BURNT FINGERS

by

MARCEL PETIT

LA PRESSE de l'Amour

PARIS

FRANCE

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Kiss In The Dark

"Will you please explain the sudden display of affection?" he asked.

By *Claire Kennedy*

BETTY FURNESS was quivering with excitement. "There he is!" she gasped. "The tall, dark one talking to Mrs. Howell. Oh, Gwen, isn't he too, *too* wonderful?"

Gwen Baker's turquoise-blue eyes shifted across the ballroom of the Howell mansion, came to rest on the tall, broad shouldered figure of a good looking young man. At a glance, Gwen could tell that he knew how to wear tails. He seemed the acme of self-assurance.

"So, that's Wells Penton, is it? Not a bad looking hombre at all."

"Gwen, how can you call him anything like that?"

"Hombre? That means man in Spanish. We always use it out West."

"I know, but you're East now, Gwen. Isn't he stunning?"

"Men aren't stunning, Betty. He's good looking, if that's what you mean. I'll bet he dances like a demon. What are the chances of wangling an introduction."

"Very, very slight. Helen Howell won't let another girl get within ten feet of him. He's the catch of the year and she's got him all sewed up. Why, do you know that he just inherited fifty million dollars from his grandfather?"

Gwen Baker smiled. "All of which makes the chase exciting. Are you laying any odds that I can have Mr. Penton eating out of my hand before the evening is over?"

Betty paled. "Gwen, you're mad! He's practically engaged to Helen. In fact, Mr. Howell will probably announce the engagement tonight. I imagine that's what this party is for."

"Where I come from," Gwen retorted, "a steer doesn't belong to anyone until it's branded. Wells Penton isn't branded yet. Anyone can rope and tie him."

BETTY WAS SERIOUSLY concerned. "Gwendolyn Baker, if you dare embarrass me I'll never speak to you again! This isn't a ranch in Montana. It's a smart drawing room in New York!"

"In Montana we usually introduce guests when they drop around to the house. Maybe that's the difference."

"Don't be silly and stop staring at Wells Penton!"

"Is there a law against looking at someone around these parts? You know, I'll wager he'd be right smart on a horse."

"Stop talking that ranch lingo, Gwen." Betty's eyes swept the room, searching for something to get Gwen off the subject of Wells Penton. "Oh, look, there's Bill and Bobby Green. They're twins. Nice boys, both of them. Come on over." She took Gwen's arm.

The Green twins spent half their waking hours playing polo and the other half thinking about playing polo. Gwen found herself in Bill Green's arms being fox-trotted around the floor.

"So, you come from out West," he said. "Got any good horses?"

"Oh about two hundred head."

"I mean *good* ones."

"About two hundred head."

HE STOPPED DANCING, looked at her deprecatingly. "Do you know a good horse when you see one?" Something side-tracked his train of thought. In fact, *two* somethings. His eyes darted from one of Gwen's firm, jutting breasts to the other. Not only were they unbrassiered, but the printed silk evening gown she was wearing outlined them perfectly, cutting beneath their lush under surfaces and puckering at their taut pinnacles.

Gwen knew he was looking at her bosom. She brought her hands up to her hips, pulled the waistline of the gown tight. Her bosom pouted in bas relief.

"Do you know a good woman when you see one, Mr. Green?" she queried, a faint smile curling her ruby-red lips. "Or shall I say a *bad* woman?"

Bill Green forgot about polo and polo ponies for the moment. "Look," he said.

"I'm looking," Gwen retorted. "And so, I notice, are you."

He flushed under his tan. "No, I mean, must we dance? Can't be talk about horses and—and things."

"Mostly things?"

He took her arm. "It's swell out on the solarium."

Gwen was thinking that Bill Green might be a good wedge to get herself in with Wells Penton. It was worth trying. "I love solariums," she said. "Particularly at night when there isn't any sun. Sunless solariums do something to me."

THE SOLARIUM WAS empty when they reached it. Neither the evening nor the party had progressed far enough as yet. Bill Green piloted Gwen to a low, comfortable glider. She slid down on it, crossed her long, slim legs. From throat to ankle her body was a firm, undulating line.

"Shall we discuss horses?" she queried mischievously.

He edged closer to her, his eyes fastened on the twin bulges that filled her gown bodice almost to overflowing. There was a hazy moon but it gave enough light to see by. Gwen's blonde, wind-blown beauty was set off perfectly in its glow. Her deep blue eyes and the magenta moistness of her voluptuous mouth contrasted beautifully with the sun-tanned smoothness of her complexion.

"Let's not talk about horses," Bill Green said. "Let's talk about you."

Gwen laughed. "From horses to me in one fell swoop!"

"I didn't mean it that way. You see, I play polo and sometimese I get fed up with horses."

Gwen's eyes narrowed. "Does Wells Penton play polo?"

"Not that I ever heard. He skeets."

"What's that?"

"Shoots clay pigeons. What made you ask about him?"

Gwen studied her crimson nails. "Oh, just curious. I'm curious about everything. Do you know Wells Penton?"

"Uh huh. Say, did we come out here to discuss Wells Penton?"

Gwen reached out and patted the back of his hand. "I'm sorry, Billy. I didn't mean to be rude."

"I'll have to send a telegram before you marry us," Gwen said.

BEFORE GWEN could retrieve her hand he had taken it. "That's okay," he said, his voice beginning to thicken up. "You know, you're different from the girls around here."

It was coming—hot and heavy. The old, reliable "line". "Tell me all about it, Billy," Gwen cooed.

"Really, you are. You're different. All the girls I've ever known—"

"Didn't have two hundred horses. Is that what makes me diffffferent?" Gwen leaned towards him, her kiss-provoking lips pursed, her lush, round breasts swinging voluptuously. "Is that what makes me different, Billy?" she murmured.

His arm came around behind her and his fingers dropped to her bare shoulder. "You're just kidding me," he said petulantly.

"Oh, Mr. Green! How could you even imagine such a thing?"

Billy Green's fingers wandered. Gwen knew his type. He was one of the "horsey set", one of the "love 'em and leave 'em" fraternity. He probably carried a black leather bound notebook crammed with feminine telephone numbers. And yet, he might be useful, Gwen thought. She offered no objection when he drew her close and pressed his lips to her hair.

"You're like a flower garden," he murmured, inhaling deeply.

"In May, Billy?"

"Any time." His breath was hot against her cheek. Suddenly he swept her into his arms and jammed his mouth down on her lips.

Gwen didn't resist but neither did she offer him any encouragement. There would be plenty of time in which to call a halt. She wanted to do it gently so as not to frighten him off.

Billy Green wasn't anticipating any trouble. His eager, searching fingers found the decollete neckline of Gwen's gown and swooped toward the clips at her shoulders.

UNFORTUNATELY—for Billy Green—his hand never reached its goal. Not because of Gwen but because of Betty Furness. She bounced into the solarium, her over-developed bosom jiggling like twin globes of aspic.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" she gasped when she spotted Billy and Gwen on the glider. "I—I was looking for you, Gwen! They're starting a game and I thought—"

Gwen rose from the gilder. "I love games! Come on, Billy, we'll play."

The poloing Mr. Green frowned as he followed Gwen back into the ballroom. He could have wrung Betty Furness' neck with distinct pleasure.

The game the assembled company was about to play seemed to be a variation of "Musical Chairs". A hundred-odd chairs were arranged in a large circle and the guests were supposed to march around in front of them in single file. When the lights went out, everyone scrambled for a chair. Since there were twice as many guests as there were chairs, those who failed to find a seat were declared out.

Betty explained the game to Gwen. "Next time around they take about ten chairs away. Then ten more. And so or until there's only one chair left and whoever gets it is the winner. Did you see the prizes?"

Gwen shook her head. "No, I didn't."

Betty was all excited. "A platinum, diamond-studded wristwatch for the lady who wins and a silver cigarette case for the gentleman. Oh, I hope I win." She quivered. "Come on, let's find a place."

Gwen engineered the finding of a place. It was as close to Wells Penton as she could get. The handsome young man stood next to Helen Howell, his fiance-to-be. Her almost proprietary domination of him annoyed Gwen a little.

"Be sure and get a chair!" Betty exclaimed. "Don't let anyone push you away!"

GWEN WASN'T INTERESTED in a chair. Something else was going through her mind. The orchestra began playing a march. Like a giant serpent, the expensively gowned women and correctly groomed men wound in and out between the chairs, hesitating before each seat in expectation of having the lights out at any moment.

Gwen wasn't watching the seats. She had her blue eyes glued on Wells Penton. Suddenly the room was blanketed in darkness. Women squealed and everyone pushed everyone else. Gwen made a bee-line for her objective, threw her arms around his neck and planted the moist, parted fullness of her lips smack against his mouth.

It was a luscious, full-bodied kiss with everything behind it, including the pushing hills of Gwen's breasts that were almost flattened against his chest.

When the lights went on she was standing in front of Wells Penton. His mouth was a crimson smear and his eyes were bulging.

"You don't look well with lipstick on," Gwen said. "Hadn't you better?"

He turned and walked away. Fortunately, there was sufficient excitement and milling around for Gwen to follow him without being noticed. He opened a door and stepped into a study. Gwen dogged his heels.

"I'll take it off," she said, reaching for the handkerchief in the breast pocket of his tailcoat.

HE SUBMITTED TO the operation. When it was through, Gwen held up the encarnadined handkerchief. "Circumstantial evidence of guilt, Mr. Penton. Shall we destroy it?"

"Before we do anything," he said, "will you please explain the sudden display of affection?"

"Sudden?" Gwen smiled. "It hasn't been sudden. I've been wanting to do it ever since I first laid eyes on you. And where I come from, when we want to do a thing we do it."

"Where, pray tell, do you come from?"

"Three Forks, Montana. Name—Gwen Baker. Age—21. Height—5 feet, 4 inches. Weight—119 pounds, soaking wet. Will I do?" She squared her shoulders, arching her breasts until the flint-like tips almost broke through the material of her gown.

Wells Penton's brown eyes were drawn to the twin projections like steel filings are drawn to a magnet. "Do you run around kissing strange men in Three Forks, Montana, Miss Baker?"

"There aren't any strange men in Three Forks, Mr. Penton."

"If there were, would you kiss them?"

"No fair. I didn't kiss strange *men*. I kissed a strange *man*. I'd do the same in Three Forks if his name happened to be Wells Penton."

Again his eyes were attracted to Gwen's mature femininity. "This deserves going into, young lady. Shall we exit into the garden?"

"Won't you be missed?"

"Nobody is ever missed at a New York party." He took Gwen's arm. "This way!"

IT WAS A MILD night and Gwen wasn't cold even without a wrap. "What about Miss Howell?" she queried. "Won't she miss you?"

"I see you know the complete case history. You Montana damsels are very thorough." He led her to an arbor, sat her down on one of its benches. "Now tell me why you kissed me when the lights went out."

"Because I wanted to," she answered.

"As simple as all that?" he smiled.

"Just as simple. I'd do it again if—if—"

"If what?"

"If I wanted to."

He moved closer to her. "Don't you want to?"

"Yes, but—but this shouldn't be one-sided. I did it the first time. It's your turn now."

His fingers fastened on her shoulders, turned her around. "You asked for it," he said, kissing her as though he meant it.

GWEN STIFFENED for a moment, then twined her arms about his neck. Slowly, her lips parted until she could feel his mouth against the moist inner surfaces of them. Tiny nerve tendrils tingled ecstatically from the caress. She could feel her breasts heaving with emotion and excitement.

It was easily a full minute before Wells Penton drew his mouth away. "My grandfather was right," he gasped.

Gwen thrilled to the gentle, soothing touch of his fingers at her throat. "Right about what?"

"He always told me to go West."

"It's a little too late now," Gwen said.

"Oh, no it isn't. Three Forks sounds swell to me. Have you room for a boarder?"

"Temporary or permanent?"

"Permanent."

Gwen cuddled up to him, pressing her bosom to his broad chest. "I think we could manage, but what about—"

He lifted her to her feet. "What about getting out of here before we run into trouble?"

"What about another kiss first?" Gwen whispered.

He embraced her and their lips fused.

THE JUSTICE of the Peace at Armonk was in the habit of being dragged out of bed at unearthly hours to tie marital knots.

"I'll have to send a telegram first," Gwen said as they stood in the Justice's red plush parlor. "I don't want to forget it."

"Use the phone," Wells suggested.

"You send it, darling. It goes to Betty Furness at the Howell mansion. Say: HOPE YOU WON FIRST PRIZE STOP I DID STOP HE'II BE BRANDED WITHIN TEN MINUTES. Sign it Gwen."

Penton's brow creased. "What does it mean?"

Gwen smiled. "Western lingo, darling. She'll understand."

Love In Disguise

By

Tom Kane

TOMMY PIKE transacted business in a room which was much more like a library than an office. But since Tommy was in the book publishing business, perhaps there was a method in his seeming madness.

Outside, the short February afternoon was drawing to a close, and the heavy drapes which were pulled across the window all but eliminated the roar which came from Fourth Avenue, fifteen floors below.

On a large leather couch which was pulled up in front of the fire, sat Tommy. At his side was a dark and very attractive girl. Her soft, shoulder length hair was parted in the center and waved gently over her ears. Her brown eyes were large and the firelight was reflected in them. She was dressed in a tweed skirt and a heavy satin blose. The outline of her high, firm bosom could be plainly seen and only one or two movements were necessary on her part to assure the

"Me jealous?" Carlotta sneered. "Don't be silly, my good girl!"

onlooker that she was not wearing anything under it. The neckline was low and when she leaned forward, which she was forced to do every so often, the tops of her round breasts could be seen and the beginning of the valley which lay between them.

"You know, I've been thinking," Tommy said after quite a pause. "You don't love me any more."

The girl stirred and tossed one slender leg over the other. The skirt worked up and she was wearing her stockings rolled. The firelight glittered on an inch or two of white flesh just above the knee. It looked soft and tempting.

"What makes you say that?" she said. She did not look at Tommy and he did not look at her.

"Oh, just things. Last night, for instance. For the fourth time in as many nights you did not ask me to come up to your apartment before going home."

Jinny smiled a bit ruefully. "I guess I never did really love you, Tommy," she said. "It must've been something else and that seems to've gone now."

"That's too bad," Tommy said in an even voice. "Because, you see—I'm still in love with you."

Jinny dropped a small hand to the back of his and squeezed it. "I'm sorry," she said simply.

TOMMY SHRUGGED a massive pair of shoulders. "Oh, it's just one of those things. You told me when it first started that it probably wouldn't last. I have nothing to complain about." He faced her suddenly and noticed that her covered breast was rising and falling rapidly. His gaze dropped to that little area of exposed flesh just above her thigh and his eyes flickered.

Jinny managed a smile. "You're not going to fire me, are you?"

"On the contrary," Tommy told her. "I've got a very special job for you. But we'll come to that later." He moved a little closer and his heart was racing. It's a hard pill for a man to swallow to be told by the girl he loves that he no longer appeals to her. It was, therefore, somewhat gratifying to discover that Jinny's pale cheeks were tinged with red and that her eyes were sparkling in the manner he knew so well. He dropped a thick arm to her satin-covered shoulders and his fingers dug gently into the soft, yielding flesh. Jinny winced, but not from pain.

"Are you certain it's dead?" Tommy said quietly.

"Yes." Jinny sounded breathless and the agitation that was going on beneath the satin of the blouse did not quite bear out the conviction.

"Quite certain?"

Jinny swayed a little towards him and the skirt crept higher. She was leaning forward now towards the fire and Tommy could see the cone-like tops of her luscious breasts and the deep valley which separated them.

"Listen, Tommy," Jinny said; "you can still stir me when you want to, but I know that it isn't permanent. I want something permanent now. We've had a lot of fun, you and I, and I guess we could go on having a lot of fun. But I want real love now. That's why I haven't invited to you to my apartment. I knew what would've happened and I didnt want it to happen."

Tommy could see the fluttering of her heart through the low neckline of the blouse and the flush on her cheeks was deeper now. Tommy knew what she meant and he appreciated her point of view. Had he felt about Jinny as she felt about him, he would have done all in his power to help her. As it was, he loved her. Honestly and sincerely. Therefore . . .

HE DREW HER TO him and crushed her against him. Jinny tried to struggle. Not so much against him as against herself. But it was a waste of time. His hands were caressing her in the old familiar fashion and she could feel the masculine warmth of them. Her throat became constricted and with a little sigh, she threw her bare, soft arms about his neck. The skirt crept higher and Tommy dropped one of his hands to her bare, round little knee.

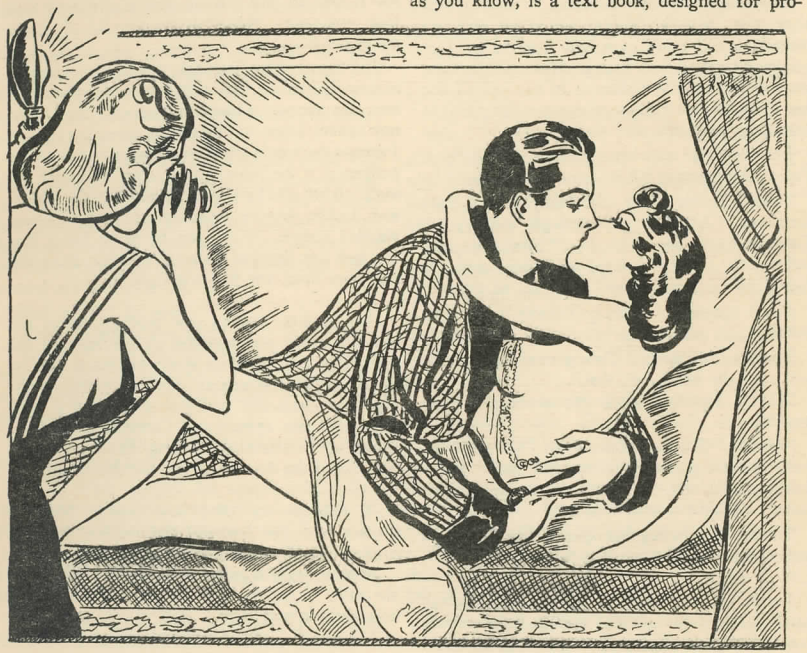
"Oh, Tommy," Jinny whispered. "I wish I didn't feel this way about you. When you're not there, I swear I don't care the least bit for you. Then you touch me . . . kiss me . . . take me in your arms and I have to call all bets off."

"Remember this," Tommy said huskily. "No matter what happens to either of us. I will always love you."

He held her against him, and the racing of his heart matched the pounding of hers. His hands were on the soft flesh of her naked upper arms, they stole under the satin of the blouse and Jinny could feel them wandering caressingly round her neck and along her bare shoulders. She was trembling and when he crushed his lips to hers, her pointed fingernails traced a scorching path along the back of Tommy's neck.

Fingers caressed the warm satiny flesh of her back, and a strong left arm crushed her against Tommy's muscular body . . . Jinny gasped and stirred. . . . Then impetuously she covered his lips with a hurricane of burning kisses.

"This must be the last time, Tommy," Jinny sobbed. "It really must! Oh, Tommy . . . ooh



"Thanks," Carlotta said drily, "I've been looking for a shot like this for months!"

—Tommy! Why, why can't I learn to love you, dear? I do think you're a swell person."

IT WAS SOME LITTLE time later and Tommy and Jinny still sat before the fire. But the lights were burning brightly and the air was heavy with cigarette smoke. Both of them were composed and at ease with each other.

Tommy broke the long silence. "And now for the job I started to tell you about." He smiled and Jinny returned his smile. "You remember Ned Weaver?"

"The aero-dynamics man? Sure. What of him?"

"Plenty. His wife is going to divorce him."

"What's so strange about that? Happens every day."

"I know, but this is something different. Listen and listen well, my little Jinny. We have all but one chapter of Ned's monumental work on aero-dynamics ready for the press. The book, as you know, is a text book, designed for professors. Ned's wife is fully aware of the tro[illegible] I had selling these professors on the idea of a young man like Ned knowing enough about aero-dynamics to write a book on the subject. She's determined that she's going to ruin this book for Ned somehow. And she's quite right in supposing that a scandalous divorce action breaking just as the book is published will go a long way towards helping her."

"She sounds like a perfectly charming person," Jinny said lightly.

"Oh, she is. She's made Ned's life a positive hell. He's had to fire seven other secretaries because Carlotta followed them about with a camera. Actually."

Jinny laughed musically. "You're kidding."

"I am not. She has one of those candid camera things and she actually follows Ned about hoping to get a good shot of him and some secretary."

"Does Ned . . . go for the pretty ladies?"

"Sort of," Tommy admitted. "And here's where you come in. You've got to get that last chapter, and I don't care how you do it. Just get it and get it in a hurry. Ned and Carlotta are cruising off the Bahamas in her yacht—she has millions—and that's where you're going to join them as Ned's new secretary."

Jinny ground out her cigarette. "You think I'm so unattractive I'll be above suspicion?"

"Yes," Tommy said and Jinny looked very surprised. "After I get through with you." Tommy eyed her critically. "First," he said judiciously and he pointed with his hand, "a tightly fitting brassiere will take care of those."

Jinny squirmed. "Don't, Tommy," she protested.

Tommy continued. "Then a steel lined girdle will ruin the beauty of that."

"Don't, Tommy," Jinny repeated a bit more weakly.

"Finally," Tommy summed up, "no make up, horn-rimmed glasses and straight hair. Badly fitting clothes and," he continued again, "woolen instead of what you're wearing."

Tommy concluding his speech found his lips were involuntarily pressed to hers.

JINNY WALKED INTO the stateroom which had been assigned to her and closed the door. It was not a good stateroom. There was no porthole and the only air she got was through a ventilator in the ceiling.

She sighed gustily and took off the hideous glasses which she had been wearing. Next she removed the badly fitting, unbecoming dress. The dress alone in that sultry climate would have been hot and with what she had been forced to wear under it, she had been stiffling ever since she had joined the yacht two days ago.

The awful brassiere and the even worse girdle were the next to go and Jinny took a deep breath. Then she opened the door of the bathroom and looked at her naked body in the full-length mirror.

Her hips were red where they had been confined by the girdle and her breasts were marked and creased. Gently she ran her hands over her yielding flesh and suddenly she found herself thinking of Ned. She blushed and her hands continued to bring life to her cramped body.

Still thinking of Ned and what a darling he was, she raised her naked arms above her head and pulled the pins from her flattened hair. Her breasts, round, high and full, had responded to her treatment and the circulation of blood had been restored. Jinny shuddered as it raced through her veins.

She loosened her hair and allowed it to tumble to her shoulders. The soft waves reformed and her skin seemed whiter in contrast. She could not banish from her mind the thought of Ned. Perhaps he would show something besides kind politeness if he knew she was an attractive female. After all, he knew her as a tightly bound, and rather frowsy spinster who wore heavy rimmed glasses. It did not occur to Jinny that she had not thought once of Tommy, since she had seen Ned, for the first time.

SHE SIGHED DEEPLY and reached for a silk kimono which was hanging on the back of the door. She tied the cord about her waist and returned to the stateroom. She sat down in the one easy chair and had just picked up a book when the door opened and Carlotta, blonde and beautiful, in stunning evening clothes, entered. She closed the door after her and leaned against it.

"I thought so," she said slowly. "So the glasses and the hair-do, the clothes and the girdles and things are just a gag."

Jinny thought rapidly. "Listen, Mrs. Weaver," she said, "I had to have the job and I was told how jealous you were."

"Jealous?" Carlotta sneered. "Don't be silly, my good girl."

Jinny choked down her anger. "Your husband doesn't know that," she hesitated, "that I'm fairly good looking and if you don't tell him he'll never find out. He can finish his book and I'll go."

Carlotta laughed harshly. "I'm not afraid of you, my girl. In fact," she added darkly, "you may be a blessing in disguise." Of course, she did not know that Jinny understood what she meant.

"Please say nothing about it," Jinny pleaded.

Carlotta turned the doorknob. "You ought to be an actress," she said, then she added grudgingly. "I wouldn't've thought, looking at you now, that there was anything you could do to make yourself appear unattractive."

"Thank you," Jinny said.

"Go to hell."

Carlotta went out and Jinny was alone. She looked down and discovered that the kimono had parted during the conversation and that Carlotta's last remark may have been inspired by the vision of two firm, full and pink-crested breasts which were quite innocent of covering. Jinny sighed and picked up her book.

JINNY AWOKE SUDDENLY and sat up. She found the stateroom flooded with light and Ned Weaver standing over her. He looked enormous in the small cabin, and he had a heavy silk dressing gown over his pajamas.

"Oh," Jinny said and did what she could with the scantiness of the nightgown she was wearing. She could not do very much and she realized that Ned could see her bosom plainly through the sheer material. This knowledge startled her and the result to her bosom was disquieting. Ned seemed not to notice her.

"I've got it," he said.

"Yes? What've you got."

"The end. The end of the chapter. Here, I brought your pad and pencil." He handed them to her and Jinny frantically tried to keep herself covered up.

"Would you mind handing me my kimono?" she asked tentatively.

"Eh?" Ned stopped his caged pacing long enough to ask. "No time now. Let's go. 'If gravity is ever to be overcome . . . ' "

Letting the nightgown do what it would, Jinny grabbed the pencil and started to take rapid shorthand notes.

She listened to Ned automatically, writing down what he said without understanding one word of it. Her temples pounded and her all but naked bosom rose and fell. She tried to get under the covers but when she did that it interfered with her notes and she had to abandon the idea.

Ned talked without pausing, pacing two strides in one direction and then two in the other. His hands were stuffed deeply into the pockets of his dressing gown and when Jimmy finally realized that he had no eyes for her at all, she became calmer and her bosom ceased its restless heaving.

At last Ned came to a halt and told her that that was all. He stopped pacing and stood in the center of the stateroom.

"Read it back to me, please," he directed.

In a quavering voice, feeling his eyes on her, Jinny did as she was asked. When she finished, she turned a flushed face to him.

NED WAS STARING at her as though he were seeing her for the first time. "Where did you come from?" he asked curiously.

Jinny smiled. "I'm Miss Richards," she said. "Virginia Richards."

Ned sat down on the edge of the bed and stared at her. Jinny's heart commenced to race anew and she wriggled a little more under the covers. Ned's eyes were sparkling.

He grinned. "But you're not the same girl," he protested.

"I'm in bed," Jinny explained.

"But . . . your hair . . . you were wearing glasses the last time I saw you. I know now what Carlotta meant when she told me. I wasn't listening to her. She talks too much and I never listen to what she has to say."

Jinny smiled. "Is it a pleasant surprise?" she found herself asking.

"You may not believe it," Ned said, "but my heart's going like a trip-hammer and my mouth is drying up. What's the idea of the disguise?"

"It makes it easier to hold jobs," Jinny said shyly.

Ned reached out his hand and took hold of her trembling one. Gently he held it. Jinny shuddered. Ned looked long at her and her gossamer covered form, and Jinny's eyes burned into his. He gazed at her lovely face with the flushed cheeks and the bare gleaming shoulders. His face came a little closer and Jinny's lips parted.

"This is mad, of course," Ned said, "but now that I know what you are . . . I'm going to fall in love with you."

Jinny sighed. "Good news from home," she said. "I fell in love with you the minute I saw you. I've been wanting you to see me as I really am. This evening, I thought about you then. I was wishing . . . "

Whatever it was she was wishing will never be known because Ned reached for her and gathered her into his arms. Jinny could feel the heat of his strong muscular hands on her soft back. For a fleeting second Ned could see her bosom heaving under the chiffon between it and his burning eyes.

THEN THE DOOR silently opened and Carlotta stepped into the room. Neither saw her as she focused the camera and it was the blinding flash of the bulb that warned them, too late, of her presence. They broke apart and Ned jumped to his feet.

"Thanks," Carlotta said dryly. "I've been looking for a shot like that for months."

Ned seemed stunned but Jinny was out of bed in a flash. She grabbed an armful of clothes and Ned by the hand. Before he knew what had happened, she had yanked him through the door, and had slammed and locked it.

"Quick," she said breathlessly, her bosom rising and falling. "Get some clothes and we'll take the launch to Cuba. We'll catch the first plane in the morning and I'll type the script on the way."

"But the photograph!" Ned wailed.

"Wait until Carlotta develops it," Jinny crowed. "I exposed all the film right after she paid me the visit this evening."

Ned clasped her in his arms. "Darling," he whispered, "you think of everything, don't you!"

Jinny pressed her mist-clad body against him. "I'm 'way ahead of you, dearest," she said. "Hurry!"

"Let's Celebrate!"

By

Barnaby Ives

HOME to Brian," sang the wheels. Nile stretched ecstastically to her toes, and flung her arms wide in a gesture which made her look, in the tan crepe gown, almost nude. It peaked her breasts and strained the thin material tightly over them, curved it in at the waist, arched out over her thighs and swept in under her knees to reveal a daring slit which gave a hint of ivory panties frosted with lace and sweet young thighs no less white, a gartered chiffon nothing, which served as hose, then the sweep of young leg.

Nature had played a trick on Nile Trent when it had given her hair as red as the fires of hell, curled about a face which was lighted by jade-green eyes under sweeping black lashes. A mouth, as crimson as a mouth could be, made a naughty slash in the whiteness of her face, then nature had, as an added gift, given her cup-like breasts which tilted upward in graceful summits.

Attraction to the nth degree was the picture and Nile had posed for a picture by that name, also a pair of pictures of Eve Before and After the Fall, others of that ilk until scarcely a millionaire but had Eve hanging in his most sacred treasury, built about the body and face of Nile.

Nile hated, not the glorifying of her radiant young beauty, but what went with it. Hands . . . trying to force her body into poses nature never intended, all for the pleasure of touching her satin skin, caressing the luscious curves. Nile wasn't unemotional, but there was Brian waiting at home. Brian, the sweetheart of her childhood, and the only one who knew that Nile's adventure into the world hadn't brought her success as an artist herself, but as a nude model.

He'd never tell, of course. Secretly he was probably ashamed of the way she made her money, for she made lots of it. He'd keep it a deep, dark secret as she had asked him to, so she could take her place in her home town circle as before.

She was going back to marry Brian. He didn't know she was ready for that, of course. She went back to her seat and read his last letter over. It was the strangest thing how much his writing was like her own. It was like reading a letter from herself to herself. They had learned to write under the same teacher but there had been a difference until the last two years. Now Brian's writing resembled hers more than her own did.

Nothing of marriage in this letter, just gladness that she was coming home to him for a vacation. She'd change his mind about it being a vacation when she got there. He'd want her to stay when he saw how she had changed, ripened into breathless beauty.

It was good of him never to speak of her in his letters as in the same class with Trude Welch. Trude was the girl all the boys went with on the sly. She had her own gang and it wasn't a nice gang, but fascinating to the nice boys. At first Nile had been afraid Brian would think of her in that class if he knew she was modeling in the nude, but he hadn't. He'd been sweeter than ever in his letters to her.

THE TRAIN BEGAN its slide over the breast of the mountain and into the valley, and Nile shrugged on her squirrel coat, settled the hat of green velvet leaves more closely and rakishly over her warm red hair and swept down the aisle.

Mom was outside. Mom was as pretty as a new red wagon for all her prematurely white hair. Mom had reasons for having her hair turn white, if Nile guessed the truth. The man, whom Nile resembled to an amazing degree had done his best along that line before he checked out of a world he lived too fast. Mom had given Nile the almost prudish temperament under her glorious beauty, which was the reason it was such a joke on Nile to be turned out so ravishingly.

Beside Mom was a tall man but it wasn't Brian. Brian didn't have sleepy Ronald Colmanish eyes, clipped moustache, and dark, wavy hair. Brian had a frank open face and a bright blonde handsomeness all his own. This man waiting beside Mom was a devil. She knew his

kind only too well. She hoped Mom wasn't crazy about him. If she was, Nile would have to step in and show Mom the kind of a man he was.

Then she was in Mom's arms and Mom was turning her around to show her off to her companion. "This is Baby, Bede," she said, with no regard for niceties. "Bede Milgrim, Nile. A very good friend of mine, and yours."

Nile nodded and went to the sleek, foreign car with Mom and her cavalier. It would be Bede Milgrim's car, of course.

"I haven't told you, Nile, but we are living at the Stone Inn. Bede has a very swank night-club and I look after the servants and buying for him," Mom said, a trifle nervously. "You always thought you'd like to live at the Stone Inn. I thought of that when Bede offered me the position."

Nile looked at the sleek man who sat on her other side and his black eyes under the sleepy lids were very warm, she found, almost hot, with little gold devils leaping there. They sent a queer tingle over her she had never felt before. Made the cuplike mounds under her gown swell until they dented it. She drew her coat closer, flushing for fear he had seen it.

"Very nice, I'm sure," she said, rather stiffly.

THE CAR STOPPED to let Mom run into a store and Milgrim leaned close so that his arm crushed the soft curve nearest him. "You don't think anything of the sort," he said, his eyes dancing. "You've looked me over and decided I'm up to no good and I'm not. I warn you, when men are made worse than I, I'll be long dead. Right this minute I have designs on you."

"You're impossible," gasped Nile, flushing to the half moons trying to push out the vee of her gown. "Hasn't Mom told you I'm engaged?"

"Yes, but it won't take," he said assuredly. "Besides, your mother likes me—a lot."

"Poor Mom, she hasn't had any experience with men like you, but I have. I'm going to look after her!" Nile cried indignantly.

Milgrim dropped his hand to her knee where the slit skirt had fallen away. "Sit still," he warned. "Half the town is staring in. If you make a scene they'll say 'Yeup, that fast Trent girl came home ready to upset Bede Milgrim's romance."

Nile shivered with anger and looked out. Sure enough, townspeople she had known all her life, were going slowly past, craning their necks. She nodded eagerly and was amazed to see that they stalked on by.

"They saw you!" she exclaimed angrily. "O how can you spoil my home coming like thi

His hand dropped and he laughed shor "Don't you suppose Brian has shared your l ters with the whole town?" he demanded angri

"What if he has, but he wouldn't!"

"You wouldn't think so, as frank as you we in them, but he has. Well, wait and see f yourself. You know your mother doesn't li him and she does like me. I've been waiti ever since I first saw your picture, for you come home."

"I haven't a doubt," Nile said sarcastically

His eyes narrowed. "You know I'm wond ing . . . maybe I have made a mistake think you were what your letters said."

"My letters said?"

He shrugged. "Let it go. You'll be plea to know I have all your letters."

"To m-mom, you mean?" Nile demand "How could she? No one was to know."

Mom came back and the car moved on to t Stone Inn. Nile drew a breath of sheer amaz ment as she saw the luxury of it, and Mom apartment at the side, was exactly as luxurious

Brian was waiting for Nile in Mom's sitti room and Mom went away on business of h own to leave them alone.

HE WAS EXACTLY as handsome as she had r membered and so young, as he came eagerly f ward and curled both arms around her eager "Nile, Nile, you exotic, luscious beauty, yo he murmured, plastering his lips against Ni in a kiss of such moistness and eagerness t she was momentarily repulsed.

His hands, too, they wandered over her a way she was accustomed to and hated.

"I can't stay but a minute, Nile, I'm givi a big party for you tonight right here at t Inn. A welcome home. Afterwards we w celebrate, just the two of us. I've taken a p vate dining room for the party and the ga will clear out afterwards."

Brian gave her another of his smother kisses, scowling at her shiver. "I thought yo be over that prudishness when you got hom he grumbled. "I've lived in hopes of it. Or i you just being coy?"

"What do you mean?"

"I guess you think I'm a small town fell and you're afraid to show me how wise y are." His hand closed about her bare should "I've been around too, Nile."

Nile jerked free, her eyes flashing. "I well we'll have to get acquainted all over

see. What do you want me to wear to your party tonight?"

"I'd like you to come like your latest picture, but I suppose you'll have to wear a dress."

"Brian!"

"Oh cut the injured air of innocence. See you some more, I hope." Brian went jauntily away and the door slammed after him.

Nile sank down on the couch, her legs shaking under her. Brian was so changed. Or had he always been that way and she didn't know it? Her last picture had been as a living girl in a fountain, water spraying from her outheld hands. It had been a lovely thing, but she had worn nothing but her long red hair and the veils of water.

Oh dear, Brian had an idea she went around like that in Chicago. She'd have to start his education after this party. Party . . . that *was* nice of him. He knew she'd want to meet their old crowd. Funny they hadn't started calling up.

MOM CAME IN AND looked at Nile's crimson cheeks and disordered gown. "Still like Brian as much as ever?" she asked lightly, and Nile thought how young and lovely Mom looked in spite of her silver hair. She might be a platinum blonde.

"Tell me about this employer of yours, Mom," Nile said evasively. "Do you like him a lot?"

"I'm crazy about him," Mom said frankly.

"But, Mom, can't you see he isn't a marrying man?" Nile asked indignantly.

"He never has been, but I think I can change that," Mom said, sauntering about. Mom had the figure of a girl.

The day wandered out, dragging its hours, like so many leaden weights.

"Which dress, Mom?" Nile asked, as her gowns, freshly pressed, hung in the wardrobe.

"The white chiffon, Nile. It's lovely. It should make you look like a nymph."

Nile reflected Mom hadn't changed at least, as she put on the floating white chiffon through which her body was a shadowy pink vase. It was a lovely thing and swept up in a gossamer, silver star spangled scarf over her perfect shoulders and fell down the nude back in a stream of separate silver stars on tiny chains so it seemed that the silver stars on the scarf had escaped to fall sportively down her back.

Brian's face fell when he saw her. "Hell! You look like a sweet girl graduate," he growled. "I thought you'd wear something sleek and form fitting. Can't you at least take off that scarf?"

"I could, but I won't."

"I bet you will when you've had a flock of drinks," he boasted.

"I don't drink, Brian. I can't. It would ruin my looks in no time, and my looks are my fortune, don't you see?" For Nile saw very plainly that her vacation would be just that and not unlike Chicago, only it would be Brian she'd be avoiding instead of the artist, Handel.

"You'll drink tonight. You shan't let me down!" he flared.

Nile said nothing for they were passing the half-open door of what was Bede Milgrim's quarters. She saw her mother in there and there were black clad arms around the slim waist of her gown, a big brown hand straying up her back which was bare to the waist, she noted.

A QUEER SICK FELLING went all through Nile, then she went quickly into the private dining room, eager to greet familiar faces of her old crowd.

She fell back on the very threshold for the faces were familiar enough, only they consisted of Trude's crowd. Trude, herself, older and tougher, and other girls Nile knew by sight in the old days two years back, but had never associated with.

For a long moment she stood there, the color draining out of her face, then she turned and looked at Brian, a blazing look of dislike and ran back along the corridor to her mother's apartment.

She was almost inside when something checked her. The door to her mother's room was open for there was a reflection in the mirror. She saw a slim foot and even as she looked, a brown hand drew off the silver pump. Shivering Nile turned back to face Brian, the picture of fury.

"What'd you run out for?' he roared. "Too good for my guests?"

"Yes, I thought so. You . . . you . . . oh all right, let's go!" Laughing wildly Nile grabbed his arm and fairly ran him back to Trude's crowd.

Nothing mattered very much. Her mother had become mad like all the rest. They all thought she was wild too, well, she would be wild, only the thought of Brian made her shiver with disgust.

The dinner went on and Nile's glass emptied and filled again and Brian became more possessive, which didn't seem to please Trude too much.

"Gee, I never believed for a minute you wrote

the letters Brian showed all over town, but I guess you did,'" she shrilled.

"Did he show my letters around?" Nile asked, momentarily sobered.

"Did he and were they interesting? Baby! The whole town sizzled over them. The parties you went on, and the wild crowd you met on Chesterfield's yacht when you went to Havana." Trude's high laughter rang out.

Nile pushed back her chair and looked around the table then at Brian, who was looking angry and scared. "I never wrote such a letter!" she cried. "Brian knows it! I never wrote him a single thing like that. Now I see why his writing kept looking more and more like mine. He was imitating mine until he couldn't help writing exactly the way I do. Own up!" she screamed, and twisting her hands in Brian's hair and jerked his head back and forth.

He staggered to his feet, clawing at her. "If you didn't write them, you should have if you'd been honest with me, but you weren't. Such simpy, prudey letters I was ashamed to show around for fear they'd laugh at me."

"So you wrote some you thought should be the kind I'd write?" Nile asked, her voice tense. "Vile things as low as your mind, I haven't a doubt. Well, let me tell you this. I never was wild. I was always decent so I could come back clean to my friends. The friends who believed I'd write letters like you say, and turned up their noses at me."

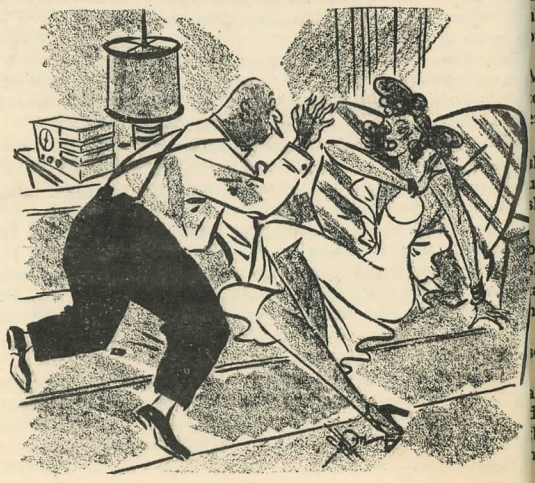
NILE RAN TO THE door, but it was the wr one. It was open and the party in the room had heard every word she said. It w big party and one like she had hoped to att of all the young folks she had run around all her young life till two years before. They stared at her, red faced and ashamed too, could see. They believed her even with Brian's confession.

She slammed that door and raced to the ot one, Brian stumbling after her. At the d Bede Milgrim stepped forward and gave Bi a push in his handsome blonde face, and slamm the door. He put his arm around Nile's wa saw that Brian had ripped the chiffon do until it was mostly tatters.

"You can't go to your mother's apartm She's . . . busy," he said quietly. "Come mine."

"Of course," Nile said, with a shrill laugh She was remembering Mom and her plan take Bede away from her before it was too but it was already too late. She remembe the big brown hand removing Mom's pump

"Forget her for a few minutes, and get straight. I'm not asking you to be wild. Fo minute today in the car, yes, then I got a into your eyes and saw the little-girl-anger th and knew Brian was a vile liar. I'd read y other letters, to your Mom you see, then I w back and read those he claimed you wrote saw that they weren't the same at all. An ex



"I'm no mind reader . . . but you sure scare hell out of me!"

wasn't needed, to tell me you never wrote those ilthy things he passed around. The whole town will know before morning and be at your door."

"I don't want the town at my door," Nile said tullenly, sinking into the corner of the big divan et before Bede's fire. "I'm going back to . . . " er voice died away for she was looking up at he girl in the fountain, hanging over Bede's ireplace, and on one side of it was Eve Before he Fall and on the other Eve After the Fall. Straight down the walls of the library marched er jade green glance and there were Handel's even canvases of her, spread before Bede Milrim's devilish black eyes.

"I bought them all and a pretty penny they ost. You see I fell in love with . . . " began Bede, then hesitated.

"I know . . . Mom, so you couldn't bear to ave her daughter's nudes scattered around the ountry," Nile said quickly, wondering why the hought made her heart turn into a frozen lump n her breast, "so you spent a lot of money to et them into your hands. You must love her lot."

"I do, she is the dearest, sweetest thing, so oung too, even though she has such a tall, orgeous daughter," Bede said promptly, his ands clasped about his knee, as he sat beside er, yet not too near.

SHE WISHED HE WOULD sit near, so near that hen he turned toward her, he'd crush her into is arms, then she remembered Mom and the and that took off her silver slipper. The same and now clasped about Bede's knee with the ther one.

Nile's glance fell to those hands. If he loved Mom enough to pay Handel's outrageous prices o get hold of the nudes of her, he loved her nough to marry her . . . then Nile gasped.

She was remembering the big hand on Mom's lipper, like a ham it had been, with wide, spatlate fingers. But Bede's hands were long and lender and brown.

"But . . . but in Mom's apartment . . . just efore the dinner . . . they weren't your . . . " he paused, biting her lips, because she couldn't attle on Mom. It hadn't been Bede in her apartment.

"I know what you're trying to say. You saw omeone in there with her?" Bede asked.

"No, that wasn't what I was going to say at ll," lied Nile, because, strangely enough, she idn't want to hurt Bede Milgrim and it was he first time she'd ever seen a man she hadn't ad a great desire to hurt, as men had hurt her.

Bede's hands closed on Nile's bare shoulders under the rags and tags of chiffon. He wrenched her around. He looked deep into Nile's strangely lovely eyes.

"Don't lie to me, Nile," he said softly. "Mom had another man in there, didn't she? Well, why not? She's young, thirty-five, isn't she? Married at seventeen, widowed at nineteen, what can you expect?"

"But don't you care?" whimpered Nile, because his hands were digging into her shoulders.

"Care? Why do you think I put the fear of the devil into that Brian, when I made him hand over every scrap of writing he claimed you had written? Why did I buy up all these nudes? Not for your mother, but because from the minute she read me your first letters, showed me your baby pictures, I was jealous of every man in your life."

"Oh, geeee . . . " breathed Nile, because at that moment he had discovered how fierce his grip of her was and had lessened it a little, then let it soften to a bare caress.

"Is it true, Nile, what you said? That you don't mind me?"

Nile drew a ragged breath and went all warm and unresisting so that he could draw her closer and caress her more boldly.

"Who . . . who is the man Mom . . . " began Nile, trying to swim out of the delirious haze his nearness was creating.

"The man I sold the Stone Inn to. It was love at first sight."

NILE DREW A shaken breath of delight. He wasn't a marrying man but it didn't seem to matter. He wanted her enough to spend a lot of money to get every bit of her, even her painted likenesses. She didn't mind his hands caressing her at all, and when he lowered his head and fastened his mouth upon hers she kissed him greedily, if awkwardly. He was a good teacher and the stiffness left her lips as he went on and on.

A long time afterwards fists pounded on the door. "Let me in," blatted Brian's voice. "She's got to be in there. I've looked everywhere else and can't find her. Nile, Nile honey, I've told our old crowd what a lying fool I was and that you are the sweet nice girl you were when you left. Let's get married and settle down in our old crowd. They're eager to welcome you back."

"Go away, Brian," Nile murmured, in a faint voice.

"Go away, Brian," Bede said louder, since no one could have heard Nile's words, said, as they were, against Bede's brown throat. "You're too late. Nile and I are going to be married in the morning and we aren't going to ask a single darned fool in town to the wedding. Then we're going to go abroad, you blissful idiot, and I'm going to make love to her in a boat in the very river for which she is named. Picture that, you fool. It's what you lost."

"Oh, Bede," whispered Nile, as Brian's roars of rage died away down the corridor. "Are you really?"

"Yes, you blissful little idiot, what did you think?" But the way he said it was far different than the way he said it to Brian. He looked down at Nile by the light of the fire. "I'm going to have Handel paint a new Eve. If you could see yourself now, all lighted up by love. It *is* love!"

"How About Bail?"

By Malcolm Post

"You'd better scram before I lose my temper," she said. "I've had enough of you for one night!"

THE girl sat perched on the end of a portable bar. She was trying to fish a cherry from her cocktail glass with a tongue as vivid in color as the fruit itself. She wore a slinky sort of a blue sequin-spangled gown and displayed a pair of legs that were ravishing in their shape and silk shrouded loveliness. The aroma of woodland violets hung about her like a breath of early springtime.

Barney Cartwright caught the drift of it as he side-stepped to the bar and ordered a Martini. The Greenwich Village studio was well crowded with friends of Silas Stayne, the illustrator, who was throwing a *bon voyage* party for himself.

Silas was sailing at midnight on the *S. S. Fortunatus* for Havre, Paris and the nudes of France. He claimed the New York nudes had all gone sour—that lines were lumps now—that girdles were covering a multitude of meals!

"Give me a Paris attic," Silas declared, "and I'll give you sketches of unclothed beauty that will make a harem of any home!"

Whatever Stayne's opinion of Manhattan maidens was, Barney found nothing radically wrong with the figure of the girl perched on the bar. She was enchanting in her youthful slenderness, in the magic of a softly curved, glamorous body, in the swelling wonder of the two conical mounds that were partially visible as she leaned back to tilt her glass higher.

Barney, who dabbled in "earl", as he called it, but didn't have to owing to forefathers who had wisely purchased railroad and utility stocks and passed them on to him when they could no longer get any earthly use from the holdings, drew a deep, uneven breath.

He could feel the allure of the girl from where he stood. She had that priceless thing so often mistakenly called "appeal". Looking at her made him think exotically of dawn-lighted boudoirs, red draperies, soft, white clinging arms and poppy lips that clung ecstatically.

When she looked up, feeling the tug of his gaze, Barney saw that her eyes were a deep gray with dark lashes, that her skin was satin smooth and flawless, and her hair a polished chestnut. He kept breathing in her perfume, his pulses stirring with the enchantment of her.

Barney smiled. "I haven't met you yet, have I? Or have I?"

"So what?" she inquired.

THERE WAS NO INTEREST in her glance. She turned away and went back to the task of dislodging the cocktail cherry. Barney grinned.

"Tough gal," he announced. "So—this: You're the prettiest dame I've seen since Dewey sank the *Maine* and I crave acquaintance. I'm twenty-six, a bachelor with money in the bank, I paint—some, and I'm a swell guy to pal around with. Whenever I whistle mink coats run right up and jump on, no fooling."

"You wouldn't kid me?" she asked listlessly.

"Have lunch with me tomorrow and find out."

"Thanks, but I'm on a diet."

"How about dinner?" he asked eagerly.

She shook her head. "Never touch 'em."

"Breakfast? There's an idea!"

"Don't know what they look like."

Barney finished his drink. "Don't say I didn't warn you," he murmured and moved on. At the other side of the room he button-holed a friend and asked: "The gal artistically posed on the damp mahogany yonder. The one with the eyes and lips. Name and address, Steve?"

"Her? She's Rita Wright, used to be Silas' favorite model until Fifth Avenue photographer snared her, gold-leafed her with important dough and made her so tall-derby that every time she speaks to a mere artist she's slumming."

"Thanks," Barney said. "That's all I want to know. And the address?"

"She parks at the Beverly, down the street."

"Thanks again."

"Hey, wait—"

But Barney was on his way out. Finding the Beverly wasn't much trouble. It was a new, big modernistic apartment building midway down the narrow street. Barney breezed in, swapped a dollar bill for information and a few minutes later was ringing a bell on the fifteenth floor.

The door was opened by a tall, thin girl who either had sore eyes or was sleepy. She looked like a maid and Barney gave her an impressive front.

"I was just talking with Rita—Miss Wright. She'll be back shortly. I'm to wait."

"You bane her friend?"

"I bane," Barney said pleasantly, putting his best foot forward and entering.

"Yust come in here," the girl told him.

Barney made himself comfortable with an art magazine in a charming setting. The small reception room was done in tan and brown. Chromium glittered everywhere. Barney told the maid to bring him a Scotch and smiled happily.

AN HOUR ELAPSED before a key turned in the lock. The door opened and Barney snapped on the lamp beside his chair. Footsteps pattered past him and electricity glowed suddenly in the bedroom across the hall.

Framed against its warm, gentle glow, Barney saw Rita again. She swung out of a short fur jacket, pulled off a tiny profile hat with an inch of veil all around and lighted a cigarette.

His eyes widened and a tiny series of thrills shot through him when he saw the girl across the way unhook the slinky evening gown and step out of it. She tossed it carelessly aside and, for

She got as close to Barney as she could, with the bar between them. "I'm not really so tough," she whispered.

a instant, Barney had a complete view of personal charms so enticing that his heart turned over.

All she wore beneath the gown was a brassiere so constructed as to bring out the fullness of her bosom, in jutting loveliness, accentuating the hollow between the breasts and making them appear more uptilted and pointed than they were actually, and a pair of black lace panties.

Barney clamped his lips down on an exclamation of admiration. He had never before seen panties like those decorating her. The legs of them, such as they were, were divided at the sides and edged with lace, so that most of her round milky thighs were visible. She made a pulse quickening picture as she sat on the edge of a chaise-longue and languidly began to unfasten the bras.

This pleasant diversion, however, was not to be fulfilled. The Swedish maid, at that point, appeared at the door. She said:

"That man bane here."

Rita's head came up with a jerk. "What man, Hilda?"

"The man what yust come. He's in there."

"You mean there's a man *here!*" Rita jumped to her feet. The bedroom door slammed. When it opened again she was cloaked in a pale green, shimmering robe that flexed against her as she walked with hip-swinging freedom.

BARNEY HAD THE lounge room lamp on, and was intent on the magazine when she stepped in.

"You!"

"Oh, hello, get back?" He threw the book aside and smiled. "Put Silas on the barge, okay? I never thought you'd show up."

"What do you want?" she grated.

"Kindness, principally," he told her. "I'm in a strange apartment so give me a break. No breakfast, lunch or dinner. I forgot to ask how about supper?"

"You'd better scram before I lose my temper. I've had enough of you for one night, Mr.—"

"Cartwright, Barney for short. You're responsible for my being here—"

"Me? I mean, I?"

"If you weren't so damnably attractive, so alluring and tempting I wouldn't have bothered. You see, I'm cursed with an artistic nature that loves beautiful things. Old tapestries or young women. They arouse and stimulate me. Let's have a drink and bury the hatchet. Can't we be friends?"

"If you don't get out of here I'll call the police!"

Her grey eyes glinted dangerously. Her posture was tense beneath the shimmering robe. The lamplight made her skin golden and struck sparks from her chestnut hair. Barney, in his whole life, had never felt so thoroughly captivated.

"Please—"

"You heard me!"

"Will I never see you—"

"If I never see you again it will be too soon!" she put in tersely. "Hilda—"

"Yah?"

"Give this man his hat and open the front door."

Barney sighed. "Oke, babe. I know when I'm back on my heels. I'll take the street this once, but I'm warning you again. As old Doc Ford said when he bolted the first flivver together, 'I'm not through yet!' "

THAT NIGHT AND for a good many nights to come Barney was troublde with insomnia. He couldn't get Rita out of his imagination. Her charm clung to him like the breath of the woodland violets she wore. A thousand times he revisualized the scene in her bedroom where had been a solitary spectator in a darkened au torium.

In a way it was rather amusing. Gals usu flocked around him because, if he did want whistle, mink coats did scurry up and jump

Finally, when he couldn't stand it any long he took a taxi down to the Village and the Bg erly. It was one of those crisp, brilliant mo ings with an Italian sky over Manhattan's turre and a winey tang in the exhilarating air.

Barney rang a familiar bell and looked i a blank, familiar face.

"Why, Hilda," he exclaimed pleasantly, "h nice you look today. Your hair—so blond. Yo eyes—so bright. And that uniform—"

"I tank you bane kidding," the girl smirk

"Not at all. Tell me something. Is your m tress home?"

Hilda giggled and shook her head. "She ba go away."

"Away—where?"

"I'm not allowed to tell anybody yust where

"Well, isn't that mysterious?" Barney lean over and put a finger under Hilda's bony ch She blushed furiously and giggled some mo "But you're going to tell me! A pretty girl li you couldn't keep a secret from a guy who thin she's a knockout. Am I right or wrong?"

Hilda swallowed and in her confusion ti and untied her apron strings. "Miss Rita's go to a place in the Catskills. It's called Coope Falls."

"That covers everything," Barney murmure "I won't tell a soul where she is. Thanks a *au revoir.*"

"Maybe you come in and have a glass *acquavit* with Hilda?"

"Some other time, honey," Barney smiled.

AT FOUR O'CLOCK THAT afternoon a plane s tled down at a Catskill landing field and at fo thirty he was registering at the Deer Arms. I searched the register and knew a heady, stirri sense of satisfaction when he saw Rita's name one page. Her suite was 304.

"How about 305?" Barney asked the clerk.

"Certainly, sir. You can call your shots at t time of the year."

"Charming little town," Barney murmur glancing out of the window while he waited fr the bellhop to collect what luggage he h brought. "By the way, anyone in the suite a joining mine?"

The clerk rolled his eyes. "Mister," he s enthusiastically, "life didn't begin at any a

ound here until the lady next door to you drove in that yaller car of her'n. If she ain't some- ng, neither is Hollywood!"

Barney made himself comfortable and waited. was just getting dark when he heard the pow- ful pant of an automobile engine in the street low. When he glanced out he saw Rita climb- from a swanky, rakish hooded coupe that was last word in modern automotives. She turned machine over to the youth who emerged from inn and ran lightly up the front steps.

After a few minutes Barney heard the door the next room in line open and shut. He omptly did something and it wasn't according the best dictates of Hoyle or Mrs. Post. Drop- ng to one knee he applied his right eye to the yhole of the door connecting the two suites. There was no key in it and the view was per- ct. He swallowed as he saw Riaa in all her ory. Evidently her mountain sojourn had done r good. Her complexion glowed and her fig- e seemed even more ecstatic than the night she d displayed it on the end of the bar in the udio.

She began to change from tweeds to a silk ess. For the second time in his life Barney ank in all the exquisite details of her young, he form. He waited and watched, his heart mmering, for a long space. Finally he got up, ent out in the hall and tapped discreetly on r door.

"Who is it?"

"Telegram," Barney said, in a muffled voice.

THE DOOR OPENED AFTER a minute. He walk- directly in, caught her in his arms and shut her scream with a quick, tempestuous kiss. he struggled wildly, twisting in his arms, until length she went limp and breathless.

Barney kissed her and kept on kissing her. he filmy robe she wore went awry. Disclosed ere the lovely twin hillocks in their net en- osure, quantities of creamy skin, curves and ntours that set Barney's blood on fire.

"You're never going to get away again!" he ld her throatily. "You're mine! I love you! I ved you the night I saw you at Silas' and I'll ver stop! You—"

She pounded her little fists futilely against his oad chest. When that did no good she re- ed and two large, crystal tears rolled down r smooth cheeks.

They, more than anything, made Barney's essure diminish instantly. "You—please don't y—I'm only trying to tell you I love you!"

"I don't want to hear it—I hate you! You're hounding me and the minute I get back to town I'm going to fire Hilda! You're a rat to come here and I—I'm not crying—"

"Okay, you win!" Barney stepped back and away from her. She was careless about the robe. It hung open now, giving him more than a hint of her swelling, tightening bosom—of thighs visible through the lattice-work of artfully laced panties and the hang of pink garters. "I—I won't trouble you again—"

He shut the door quietly behind him, drew a deep, uneven breath and raised his coat sleeve. The scent of wild violets clung to his coat. Barney unsteadily made his way to the street. He felt he needed evening air in quantity. He walked a block, trying to get the witchery of her out of his mind and blood. It was impossible. The soft, warm feel of her in his arms was a mental goad.

" 'Evenin', friend. Stranger in town, be you?" A pulse still hammered in his throat.

Barney turned. A bewhiskered gentleman in a blue uniform, with a large tin star attached, was looking him over. Recognizing the Law, brought to a high degree of rural efficiency, Barney smiled affably and offered the officer a cigar.

"Let's—let's take a walk," he suggested, "I've got troubles and I'd like to share them."

AT THREE THE next afternoon the clerk at the Deer Arms sent a bellhop for Barney who, in the bar, was trying to wash his troubles away with apple-jack and gingerale.

"Wanted on the phone, Mr. Cartwright."

Barney stepped into a lobby booth and unhooked the receiver. "Yes—"

Rita's voice sounded in his ear. It was low, indignant, strained. "I've been arrested," she began succinctly, "for speeding!"

"Really? Were you—speeding, I mean?"

"I was doing 65. Anyway, I'm over here in the iron theatre and they want a thousand dollar bail bond before I can get out!"

"And so," Barney murmured, "hating me though you do, you think I'm the only palooka on the property who can come across and keep you from bread and water. So what? Didn't you say that once and didn't you tell me you were on a diet?"

"Never mind!" There were tears in her tone. "Just forget I ever called you—"

"I'll be right over!" Barney informed her. "Polish up the bars and clean the rockpile. Three minutes—"

The village jail was a laugh. It resembled that of a comedy film. Inside on a high, gas-lamped bench, an elderly gentleman dozed. The cop Barney had given the cigar to greeted him when he went in.

"How about bail?" Barney inquired.

"Thousand dollars, mister. Speeding's serious, speeding is. Reckon she was doing a hundred an hour. I had to telephone East Willowbrook to have 'em stop her so I could ride over on my bike and bring her back. Lord knows how many she'd have killed if there'd been anyone on the road! Speeding's serious—"

"You said that before," Barney interrupted. "Before I lay the bail on the line I'd like to see and talk with the young lady."

"Right this way, mister."

A WAN, DEJECTED Rita came to the stout iron bars in the melancholy cell in the basement that Barney was escorted to. She looked at him with glowing eyes, her exotic red lips quivering.

"All right, Hy, you can fold the tent and silently steal away."

"Huh?"

"I want to talk with the lady alone."

Barney went closer to the bars when the bewhiskered gentleman departed. "I've heard the charges and they're pretty tough. You're in a spot. They want to make an example of you, but I think I can fix it. I'll do that on conditions."

"What—conditions?"

"First, that you don't fire Hilda. Second, that we finish your vacation together—with a lot of loose rice in our hair and ears. And third, that you agree to these things by stepping closer and pursing the most heavenly pair of lips in the entire universe, Cooper's Falls included."

He waited expectantly, nervously, anxiou A long minute dragged by. Then, all captiva enchantment, lips parted, she crept closer to bars. There was enough room for her pr face. The aroma of violets grew pronounce one of her little hands slipped confidently his.

"I'm not really so tough," she whispe "That's why I'm so scared right now. You w sweet to stick around after the way I crac down on you Barney. Please—*kiss me!*"

Barney did, pushing wide the pearly gate Paradise while his arms went between the b and around her slim, beguiling body. She as close to him as she could and for a blis eternity their lips clung. . . .

After the bail was set and Barney had whole thing washed up with the check he das off to the magistrate's private office. Hy, the derly cop, watched them climb into the ye roadster and drive off.

"Danged if I git it!" he said to his supe "He might be a right smart feller, but it d make no sense to me."

"What's that, Hy?" the other asked slee

Hy fiddled with his whiskers and cackle laugh. "I mean him bribin' me with two h dred dollars last night to pinch her for spee and then goin' and spendin' a thousand m to git her outta here. Just don't seem sens What do you think?"

COME ON, MISS DE VERE, TAKE IT OFF! REMEMBER, YOU'RE OUT IN A DEEP FOREST WITH NOT A LIVING SOUL IN SIGHT!"
DIRECTOR
"YOU MAKE SOCIAL SCIENCE SUCH AN INTERESTING COURSE, PROFESSOR"
"BUT MISS EVANS... I JUST BOUGHT OUT MR. BLATZ!"
STAIR & LADDER
"PA SAYS TO COME HOME AND PUT ALL SIX KIDS TO BED PRETTY DAMN QUICK!"

Passion de Luxe

Once again "The Flame", greatest of International spies, whirls through a maze of Intrigue . . . Danger . . . Love . . .

By PAUL TERRY

THE taxi whirled to a stop before the gu
smith's shop on the Rue de Grasse. Th
door opened and The Flame stepped fro
the cab. Even in the dim halflight of the sha
owed street her intense beauty was like the gla
of fire.

She went down nine stone steps. A brass si
affixed to a moldy door confronted her. It re
A. Fernec. A common name, without particul
significance. To The Flame it was of the u
most importance. Alfredo Fernac, gunsmith, i
ventor and genius of high explosives, was pa
of the great system of which she was so nece
sary a cog.

Tonight orders had come. Fernec was to pa
on to her the blueprints and specifications of
new soundless machine-gun he had just perfecte
And the plans were to go forward at dawn!

The Flame fumbled for the corroded kn
She drew her mink wrap a little more close
about her silk clad body as she stepped into th
dark passage on the other side of the doo
Silence in a great wave beat against her ear
The drip of water, scurry of mice in the ancie
walls and the creak of boards under her dainty
high heeled slippers.

There was a door sharply to the left. A
faint pencil of light crept from the sill. Th
flame moved toward it. When she went in sh
came to a quick stop. Her green eyes, unde
their long, dark lashes, widened. Her sensuou
poppy-red lips parted and her fingers tighten
on the mink edges of the luxurious wrap.

SHE WAS IN a workshop. Parts of dismantle
guns, barrels, stocks and all the intricate mechan
isms of death, were scattered heedlessly about
A man rested his shoulder against the frame o
another door, separated from an adjoining roo
by the slinky hang of a greasy curtain.

"Eric!"

He turned and the Flame's heart leapt. Tal
slim, blond and blue eyed, Eric Strange cam

toward her. Silently, with all the upflare of emotions suppressed for the fortnight of their parting, The Flame melted into his arms.

The wrap swung wide so that her softly curved, warm body could flex itself closer to him. Her white arms, sinuous as satin snakes, twined about his neck. She tilted her head back, offering her throbbing lips for the kiss he laid passionately upon them.

"Eric! What are you—"

He held her in his embrace. His hands, slender and like those of a musician, wandered caressingly over her. They seemed so instinctively to caress her that his touch awoke vibrant thrills.

For a minute he gave himself to the joyous delight of their meeting, to the rapture of her lips. Then, abruptly, his handsome young face

"Monsieur, I warn you!" The Flame hissed. "One move or an outcry, and I fire!"

hardened and his blue eyes turned to chips of ice.

"I had orders in Vienna. I flew over. I arrived two hours ago. I came directly here to find—*this!*"

Something in his voice was like a dash of cold water. The fierce ecstasy bubbling within The Flame subsided. She followed his gaze with her own. Eric's eyes lanced to the gloom in the room beyond.

HE TOOK A POCKET torch from his coat. A press of its button and its light stabbed the recesses of the piled-up gloom.

"What, Eric? What's happened?"

There was a stifled note of apprehension in The Flame's low voice. So many times, in this game of duplicity and danger, she had reached what appeared to be a triumphant goal, only to find it a mirage. So many times, had the cup of success been dashed from her lips!

"Fernec!" Eric whispered.

The torchlight roved midway across an uncarpeted floor. It came to rest on the contorted figure of a man who lay crumpled there. His arms were flung wide, his sightless eyes were turned toward the grimy ceiling and his black-bearded face was chalky with the pallor of death!

The light winked out. Eric strange drew the curtain. In the quiet the clash of its brass rings on the pole made an eerie sound. Limply, The Flame rested against him, her green eyes narrowed, a pulse beating in the white, rounded column of her throat.

"The blueprints and specifications!" she whispered through dry lips.

"Gone—stolen! I was a half hour too late!" Eric Strange circled her with his arm again. "Come, let's get out of here. There's nothing we can do now. I've got to talk to you—"

He shut the door with the brass name-plate behind them and guided her to the street. All around them the nocturnal song of pleasure that Paris sang took on a livelier lilt. The Flame hardly heard it. In her mind and imagination was the rankling despair of defeat. The Enemy had struck! In their possession now were the plans of a thing that might change the destiny of nations! She drew an uneven, choked breath.

ERIC FOUND A TAXI at the corner. He gave the driver a destination and handed her in. In ten minutes they were over the Pont Neuf and into the Avenue Le Grand. The vehicle stopped before a three story building.

"My apartment," Eric explained briefly. keep it the year round. Wait—I must be s we weren't followed."

The three rooms were plainly but comfo ably furnished. They were masculine in appoi ments. The Flame flung aside the mink wr Gratefully she took the Cognac Eric poured her. She needed a stimulant, something to tigh her frayed nerves and give her courage to thi clearly of the next step.

He sank down on the pillow-strewn cou beside her. To The Flame he had never look more virile or handsome. She urged hers close to him as if to find new strength in nearness. Her posture was one of magnetic lure, unconscious, a part of her. The glory her voluptuous body, surmounted by the tw beauties of the breasts swelling so provocative in their net enclosure, the wiles of her s hips and the thighs outlined by the clingi silk dress and tapering into the shapely, pe fect legs, had never been more glamorous.

But Eric hardly seemed to see them. jumped up presently and took a nervous tu or two about the room. He spoke under h breath, to himself:

"The man who calls himself Baron Hens arrived in Paris Thursday. Operator X suppli that information. The Baron is one of the hig est paid members of the System. I think shall make a call—"

LANGUOROUSLY, The Flame waited while Er spoke over the phone in rapid, staccato Frenc She saw his expression change. His brows dre together and his mouth hardened. When hung up she leaned forward eagerly:

"The Baron—"

"Was seen entering Fernec's shop at seve twenty-eight tonight. One half hour exactly b fore I arrived!"

"Then the Baron—"

"Has what we want!"

The Flame pushed her glass aside. T warmth in her dreamy eyes vanished. Sensuo seduction faded from her poppy-red mouth. I stantly she was a thing of tenseness.

"Good! I will see the Baron and recover wh he killed Fernec to get!"

"You—"

She laughed harshly. "Why not? He's a ma isn't he? And I'm a woman—"

"The most glorious woman in the world!"

"All the better. Eric, quick. Use the te phone again. Get me facts. Where is the Baro

Something in his voice was like a dash of cold water. "What's happened, Eric? What's wrong?"

aying? Where is he now? I know him by sight I need no description."

"But how—"

Her green eyes glittered. "How will I get ack the plans? By the oldest and easiest method nown—by the lure of beauty, the power of assion, by temptation and madness! What man as proof against the set trap of a woman?"

For a long minute Eric Strange studied the ovely face turned excitedly to him. Deliberately e shook his head, smiling thinly.

"It won't do. I'll tell you why. The Baron elderly, as you know, burned out and finished. That's why the System uses him. He's invulerable against any woman's wiles. In his day e was one of the most notorious rakes and ues on the Continent. No beauty can attract is attentions. He had them all, from La Ninon, he *chanteuse,* to Madame Dubois, the wealthiest oman in France. But that was long ago. The ook is closed."

"But it can be reopened!"

Eric shook his head again. "I'm afraid not. assion is a memory with the Baron."

"But a new passion!" The Flame cried. "Pasion de luxe!" She bent forward, her lacquerpped fingers opening and closing. "It's our nly chance, Eric! I must take it! By morning will be too late! Make the call, get me the nformation!"

TWENTY MINUTES LATER The Flame was ready to leave. Eric took her in his arms for a last kiss. He crushed his mouth over hers in a frenzy of desire. The Flame responded gladly. This man was the only one she had ever loved in all her career of intrigue and danger. She had known him less than two months but in that time something had grown within her heart until it overpowered her with its rapture.

Reluctantly she tore her lips from his, whispered one final word and let herself out.

For her business in Paris, The Flame had taken a suite at the Hotel Angleterre on the

Rue Richelieu. It was a luxurious suite in an hostelry where wealth and fashion met and merged. When she reached her rooms she rang for the hotel maid and began stripping off the clothing she had worn for dinner that night.

"Hurry, Marie. Run my tub. Sprinkle my perfume in it. Heat the towels. I will tell you what to lay out as I bathe."

The tumbling rain of a shower turned her svelte body to glistening ivory. It cascaded down the deep declevity between the cone-tipped, upthrust breasts. It ran off her flat tummy with its single dimple and made her thighs twin miracles of sculptured perfection.

The warm towels dried her swiftly. She threw a *peignoir* over her naked charms. Marie had been busy laying out fluffy, delicate garments. The Flame stepped into a pair of black lace panties, loose-legged and edged with expensive lace. Gossamer silk clouded her symmetrical legs. She used no brassiere. The daringly cut evening gown she donned was a chalice for all the voluptuous elegance of her face and figure.

"I must look my best tonight," she told the maid.

"Mademoiselle is *charmante!"* Marie breathed, rolling her eyes. "Ha! How fortunate the man who has *mademoiselle* for a companion tonight!"

Critically, The Flame considered her vivid radiance when she was ready to leave. Her black, lustrous hair was like polished ebony. Her flawless, alabaster cheeks glowed and her curved mouth was a bow of crimson delight.

Once more mink cloaked her snugly. She said good night to the maid, descended to the lobby in a purring elevator and had the doorman whistle for a taxi.

THE BAL ETOILE was high on Montmarte. It was crowded as usual with its pleasure seekers when The Flame reached it. Her pulses stirred. The man who called himself Baron Hensel was somewhere in its crowded confines. She had to meet him, to arouse his interest and leave the place with him!

Confidence shone in her green eyes. She wouldn't fail! But her heart sank swiftly as in the noisy foyer, a voice spoke a single word at her side.

It said: *"Gabrielle!"*

The Flame suppressed a gasp. Not in months had she heard the word. She turned to look into the thin, shrewd face of a young man who smiled blandly at her. He was slender, wiry dressed with foppish care. The Flame recognized him instantly as Owen Lascar, an admirer had annoyed her in Naples, followed her to don and to Port Said. She had managed to him off there but now, like the proverbia penny, he had turned up again in Paris.

And at a time when every minute was cious!

"I have looked everywhere for you! Gab if you knew what I've gone through—"

The Flame shook her head. "I think, said in French, "you have made a mistake, *sieur*. I do not know you."

Owen Lascar's mouth tightened. "So the way it is! Very well," he continued gr "you will know me before tonight's over. *moiselle,* let me order a table for two."

His hand dropped familiarly to The Fl arm. Her eyes narrowed. She stood motio "You will remove your hand, instantly, *m'* I do not know you and I do not want to you continue to—"

A short, stocky Frenchman who had been ening, stepped up to them. He bowed. "If *moiselle* wishes I will have this man put I am Savoire, the manager—"

Owen Lascar dropped his hand quickly. Flame smiled at Savoire. "Oh no. The ge man made a mistake. I am sure he will bother me again—"

Lascar turned and melted into the room yond. Leisurely The Flame followed Savoi a choice table and sat down. The floor show in progress. An ensemble of statuesque scantily clad, were singing and dancing the Parisian hit.

Savoire bent over, admiration in his glance. "If there is anything else I can d

"You can tell me if Baron Hensel is h

"But *certainement!* He is directly across you. That elderly man, alone at that table.

THE FLAME'S GAZE darted across the plac focused on the shrunken figure of a wrin parchment-skinned man who sat with a bott champagne before him. The Baron was in ning clothes. An ancient decoration ornam his brocaded waistcoat. His bald head glist in the calcium lights.

A tingle of anticipation ran through Flame's blood. So this was the one who himself the Baron Hensel. This was the against whom her courage and intelligence be pitted! She was glad she had asked the ager to point him out. Hensel had changed s ingly since she had last seen him in Budape

"To be alone—"

The Flame leaned over and shook the Baron by the shoulders. "The plans!" she breathed. "Where are they?"

Savoire looked at her. "Would *mademoiselle* like to meet His Excellency? Strange. When he came in a half hour ago he asked me to find him a companion. His stipulation was only a beautiful girl. No one, in my humble opinion, has been worthy of that honor until *you*—"

The Flame was on her high heeled feet instantly. "Take me over and introduce me. I am Sonya Gerdy, a dancer!"

ANOTHER MINUTE and The Flame was seated opposite Hensel. He surveyed her through his monocle. She let him study the beauty of her face and figure, the bulge made by her bosom where the twin hillocks nestled so closely together, her slim waistline and the gorgeous hips and legs. She forgot the menace of Owen Lascar, the knowledge that he was somewhere in the throng, watching and eating his heart out, while the Baron himself poured her a glass of champagne and lifted his own.

"To you—*Mademoiselle Exotique,* the most beautiful girl in this beautiful city. So you are a dancer? I should like you to dance for me, *cherie!*"

"Perhaps, sometime," The Flame murmured indifferently. "I came over principally to see what a Baron is like. I have met Counts, Dukes, but never a Baron. This is an experience."

He chuckled. "Well said, little lovely one. Finish your champagne and lets get out of here. This is no place for conversation."

"It pleases me," The Flame drawled. "Look at that floor show. Beautiful girls, with lovely bodies! Do you notice—"

"I can see only you!"

"Where would you want to take me?"

"To my apartment. Where else? You have probably seen the suites of your Counts and Dukes, now you must observe how the other half lives—how a Baron maintains himself. Don't you think so?"

The Flame laughed under her breath. "Perhaps you are right. How a Baron maintains himself."

Hensel clapped his hands. *"L'addition, garcon."* To The Flame he continued. "Age is a crime, my dove. Listen to me creak. You shall be perfectly safe with me!"

A thrumming, expensive motor car with a coat-of-arms emblazoned on its tonneau panels took them down to the boulevards. It lanced under the Arc de Triomphe, turned a corner and pulled up before an impressive limestone building. The Flame let him take her arm as he hobbled up clean swept front steps. Another minute and they were in the lounge room of a house furnished with exquisite taste.

THE FLAME KNEW it was probably leased for the man's stay in Paris. The Enemy was fabulously rich. They could afford luxury for their agents when the final payment meant death, destruction and empires to win!

The Baron took her mink wrap. He flung it aside and confronted her. Once more his eyes stole over her. They seemed to pick out every enticing detail of her. He was like a connoisseur examining a jewel in quest of flaws that did not exist.

"Beautiful, beautiful!" He made a gesture. "Champagne, then more champagne! My servants are out and we are alone here! We have all the night before us and you—shall dance for me!"

While he brought in wine, The Flame's mind worked fast. Unless she and Eric Strange were entirely wrong, the blueprints and specifications stolen from the shop of the murdered Fernec, were somewhere close at hand!

Would she be able to charm and enchant Hensel so that she could make a search for them? Was there still a spark burning within him that could be fanned to white-hot fire? This was no ordinary scene of temptation. As she had told Eric passion de luxe was necessary.

The champagne bubbled and fizzed. She marveled at the Baron's capacity. The Flame d sparingly. There was too much at stake to numbing her senses with the amber fluid. Fi he drank the last of the beverage in his and laid a hand on the polished case of a trola.

"Cherni Mogowski's splendid orchestra made a recording of *La Siren*. It is my fav piece. It is barbaric, strange and wonderful. will dance to it, my dear."

"If you wish—"

He got another bottle of champagne be he started the record. He filled his glass waited eagerly. The Flame, whose beginn traced back to the dance floors of innumer cafes, knew the selection the orchestra play

She got up and moved out into the cente the floor. All at once she became a thing lithe grace and poetic motion. She begar dance, with the swirl of skirts. Faster and fa while the brasses clashed and the woodw piped she spun in a thousand voluptuous rev tions.

WHEN THE CLIMAX came, The Flame hooked and opened one side of her evening g She pulled it low over her ivory shoulder. Lo and lower, her skin and body ravishing in revelations. Now soft curves sprang into v the hint of a hip, striking thigh lines and gar above smooth stocking tops where white gleamed.

The cymbals struck brazenly. The Ba moved his hat and collapsible opera hat f the divan. The Flame whirled over to it sank into his arms.

For a breathless space he caressed her. stroked her with his claw-like hands, mumb his admiration thickly. He pulled the dress at the other shoulder and for the first time Flame realized how drunk he was. At last huge amount of champagne he had consu struck!

"Kiss me, my—my little wren! Kiss—me

The Flame's palpitating lips fastened to She lay back among cushions, drawing him to her. Shakily, with unsteady hands, he fum at the waist of her gown. The Flame m no move to interfere, her mind white-hot thoughts and ideas.

Presently the Baron tipped forward slumped down among the pillows. His mon tumbled from his eve. His body went rigid relaxed. A combination sigh and snort iss from his seamy lips.

The Flame sat up quickly. She arranged her ss in place, smoothed her inky-dark hair. ruptly she glanced around the room again. use wasting time in futile search. She leaned r and shook the Baron by the shoulder.

'Fernec's plans! Where are they?"

'Eh?"

She continued to shake him, repeating the stion over and over until it beat against his -conscious mind like the thud of an African m. Once he opened his watery eyes, but the rt was too great. His head lolled back and spoke thickly, a blast of wine fumes coming m his open mouth:

'In the cabinet—top—drawer. Come closer. pet. Kiss me—again—and again—"

Twenty steps took her to the cabinet. The me tore the top drawer open. Her tapering gers delved into a mass of documents. Out them she snatched Fernec's design and the n, accompanying tissue with scientific detai ed on it.

SHE HAD HARDLY found what she wanted en she heard a warning sound. She wheeled idly back to the divan, to the Baron, his adcloth coat and the shut opera hat. She s ready for the unexpected when the alcove rtieres parted. A man came through them. e Flame stared into a familiar thin face as ven Lascar gave her a mocking smile.

"We meet again, Gabrielle! This time with pig of a manager to interfere!"

"You followed me here!"

"Of course. It appears we are both highly erested in His Excellency. You are for one ason, I for—not another—but *the same ason!"*

The Flame felt a cold chill creep the length her spine. She understood immediately. Owen scar was something more than a frustrated mirer craving a night of romance with her! e was a spy, an agent of some other System no, in the complex ring of intrigue, had made e Fernec plans his own goal!

"You mean—"

He laughed mirthlessly. "I mean, my dear abrielle, I will take from you what you took om him! Come, hand them over and be quick out it! I am in no mood for delay!"

The Flame's smile was warm and thrilling. Are you in a great hurry? Look, there is still enty of champagne left—"

"None of that! I am temptation-proof! That unken sot can succumb to your charms, not I! Fernec's gun plans and specifications! Hand them over!"

The Flame still smiled. For an instant she thought of accepting his challenge. Temptation-proof? Then, her thoughts changed. Why toss the dice again? The night was almost gone. Presently it would be dawn and—

"Very well," she said quietly. "I know when I am defeated, *monsieur.*" She walked over and picked up her mink wrap. Lascar, a blaze of victory in his gaze, waited while she slid her hand into the warp's inner lining. But instead of papers, The Flame produced a small, flat automatic. She swung it around in a deadly arc and covered him with it so quickly he had no time to move.

"But sometimes," The Flame laughed, "we can turn defeat into success by a ruse similar to this. *Monsieur,* I warn you. It would be a pleasure to send you down to some of your friends in the red kingdom below. A move or an outcry and I fire! You understand?"

Lascar's tongue played over his sensual lips. "Perfectly," he said slowly.

STOPPING ONLY TO gather up one thing more, The Flame backed to the door. She took the key from the lock, crossed the threshold, turned it in the outside lock and ran down the stairs and out into the dawn-gray pavements.

Fortunately a taxi was cruising past. In an instant The Flame was in it, safe at last!

Eric Strange opened the door at her impatient knock. The Flame, with a happy exclamation, stepped into the circle of his arms.

"Kiss me, *mon brave!* Kiss me like you never have before! Soothe my nerves and bring back that delicious madness that you know so well how to inspire!"

For a long interval Eric did her bidding. Then he looked at the thing she had taken from the divan in the Baron's apartment. His eyes were full of wonder and perplexity.

"The Fernec plans! Tell me! What happened, were you successful?"

"The Flame never fails!" she whispered, picking up the collapsed opera hat. She snapped it open and presented it to him with a flourish. "Not rabbits, dearest, papers, plans! It was the only place I could hide them when I heard that warning sound!"

The hat tumbled to the floor while Eric drew her to him, once more to experience the ecstatic thrills of what she had referred to as passion de luxe!

"Melody Lingers On—

By

Mason Johns

HARRIET SMITH waited, not without a certain amount of trepidation, just inside the stage door of the Century Theatre. And, looking at Hat was to wonder why she ever felt doubtful as to her reception anywhere.

She was dressed in a dark silk dress and a small, perky hat; over one arm was draped a very nice fur coat, and she was so pretty that, at first glance, you were inclined not to believe it.

Her hair was dark and thick and her eyes large and almost black, and her figure was absolutely the last word. The dress fitted snugly here and there. Just above and just below the waist to be exact. The neckline was a low V held together with a large, cameo pin. It was quite obvious that she was wearing nothing underneath at least the bodice of the dress, and the firm, high outline of her bosom was there to be seen.

Hat was just beginning to become impatient when the page boy returned.

"Johnny Turner says for you to go up. Dressing room number four. Can you find your way?"

"I guess so."

"First landing—first door on the right."

The page boy watched Hat enthusiastically as she mounted the stairs. As she walked, it was plain that her movements were not hampered by a girdle, and the boy sighed a little as she rounded the corner and was lost to sight.

Johnny was waiting for her. She stepped into the room and they gazed at each other. Then Johnny's handsome face broke into a good natured grin and he dropped both hands to Hat's shoulders.

"Hat, of all people," he said. "Sugar, I can't tell you how glad I am to see you."

Hat smiled and showed her perfect teeth. She tossed the fur coat onto the back of a chair and faced him. "Johnny," she said, "I was wondering if you'd remember me."

"Remember you!" He laughed boyishly he stepped back and looked her over. "put on weight, Sugar," he said.

Hat glanced down at her protruding and spreading hips. "You mean," she co him, "I've filled out a little."

"I'll say you have." Johnny ran his over her appreciatively and Hat stepped The color had rushed to her face and he had commenced to gleam.

"Don't do that, Johnny," she said. "Th of thing's all over between us. I cam on business."

JOHNNY PAID NO attention to her. Still ing her with his eyes, he said, "The las I saw you was in a one-piece bathing su if you'd worn a bra or a girdle, there woul been anything left of you."

"You didn't seem to mind at the time, reminded him.

"I didn't." He took a step forward a placed his hands on her silk-covered hips wriggled and her eyes flashed. "But I lik better this way," Johnny said.

Hat slipped away from him and walke to the couch. She sat down and crossed he The skirt was too short to cover her kn that position and since her stockings were below them, Johnny could see that they to filled out and were round and dimpled.

"Well, Johnny," Hat said with a co change of tone, "we've both gone a lon since the days of WHKH back in Toled

Johnny grinned. "I'll say we have. The and I've been held over here for the third

Hat smiled. "And success hasn't gone t good looking head?"

Johnny shook the good looking head. " you've been kicked around as much have . . . " He did not finish.

"I caught the show this evening," Ha "You can certainly play the piano."

"I've worked hard enough at it. How d like my arrangement of 'Melody in F'?"

"Swell. Listen, Johnny, you're not th one who's gone places since the days of WHKH. I'm assistant production manager for the International Broadcasting System."

Johnny's eyes widened. "Say . . . what d'you know about that?"

Hat patted the couch at her side. "Come over here and sit down," she ordered. "I want to talk to you." Johnny did so and his eyes seemed fascinated by the low-pinned V of her dress. Hat felt the increased rise and fall of her breasts and she knew that the contact of them against the silk of the dress was making things pretty obvious. She shuddered. "Stop looking at me that way," she said sharply.

"Come to my apartment and we'll have some petting," Celia invited.

JOHNNY LEANED towards her. "Do I still do something to you, Hat?" he asked softly. "After all these years?"

"Yes," and Hat's voice was very low.

"My heart turned over twice when you walked in the door," Johnny said.

"I came here to talk business," Hat insisted. But Johnny's eyes upon her were more than she could stand and she felt herself swaying towards him. Johnny dropped a muscular arm to her shoulders and dragged her to him. He bent her dark head back and pressed her lips fiercely to his.

Hat quivered and then she felt his hot hand

on the bare flesh of her round little knee as he drew her to him. She slipped her arms about his neck and held him desperately. She could feel the pounding of his heart against her.

They fell against the back of the couch and Hat jamed her throbbing bosom—so light covered—against him. Johnny's caresses were driving her mad and his hot lips seemed to be burning right through her. She stood it as long as she could and then broke away. Gasping, face flushed and fighting for breath, she almost collapsed against the back of the couch.

"You're more thrilling than ever," she finally managed.

Johnny's mouth was dry, his face was flushed and his hands shaking. So softly she could scarcely hear him, he said, "I don't know what's happened to you—but you're more gorgeous than ever."

Hat did not answer, but she raised a protesting hand when Johnny moved as if to come to her again. "Not yet, Johnny," she said. "I came here on business and as soon as I get my breath again, I'm going to state it. After that . . . who knows?"

JOHNNY GRINNED, STOOD up and lighted a cigarette. His heart was still beating fast and he was happier than he had been for some time. To find Hat again after all these years . . . and a Hat as maturely lovely as she was.

"Listen," Hat said calmly, after awhile, "your band's pretty popular, isn't it, Johnny?"

"Yeah. They tell me that my records are constantly being called for on the all-night recorded programs. Especially 'Melody in F'."

"I'm going to be blunt with you, Johnny. With the exception of your piano—specifically in that number you mention—yours is just another good dance band."

Johnny grinned cheerfully. "You're not telling me anything," he said.

"Okay. Now listen. There's a man out on the Coast who's anxious to sponsor a good dance band twice a week. He's almost sold on Arturo Vargas and his Argentinians."

"He smells," Johnny said.

"Look. We've aranged with this fellow to pipe through to him after the New York station signs off on Friday night, a fifteen minute program, advertising copy and all, of Vargas and his orchestra."

"That doesn't interest me," Johnny said.

"Wait. It will. How would you like to gamble? I'll arange fifteen minutes for you and your boys and if you play as you played this evening . . . Vargas won't stand a chance."

Johnny dropped again to the couch and leaned towards her. "Could you do that?" and his voice was tense.

"I could and I will. You rehearse that 'Melody in F' of yours until it's absolutely perfect. That's the baby that's going to sell the band."

"Gee, Hat—you're sweller than ever."

He rose and closed and locked the door. Then he returned to the couch and took Hat in his arms. She came willingly enough and leaned her soft weight against him.

"Now what?" she whispered.

"Now I'm going to find out just how much you have changed in your love for me, if any."

Hat only breathed a little harder when she felt his fingers fumbling with the large pin that held together the blouse of her dress. She could feel the hammering of his heart against her and the arms that were about her were rigid with emotion. She closed her eyes and clung to him.

The pin came unfastened and the blouse parted. Nothing was said and then Johnny's lips burning like fire, moved down her throat and came to rest in the soft hollow at the base.

"Oh, Johnny. . . " Hat whispered.

"I'll say you haven't changed." She could hardly hear him but that did not matter.

As she drifted off into a sort of coma, Hat realized that she had loved Johnny all the time. His hands seemed to be electric magnets which drew her irresistibly to him, and then his burning lips were crammed against hers.

ON FRIDAY NIGHT after the last performance, Johnny was resting in his dressing room. What with rehearsals and shows, he was tired out, and since it would be three hours before he and the boys were to broadcast the test radio program, he thought he might just as well take a nap.

There came a rap at the door and before he could answer, it opened and Celia Sears came into the room. She was the vocalist in the band and Johnny had not paid particular attention to her. Celia closed the door after her and Johnny sat up.

"Johnny," Celia said as she advanced towards the couch, "I came to wish you luck."

Johnny grinned. "Thanks, Celia." She stood there looking at him and Johnny really saw her for the first time. She was very blonde and very pretty and she was holding a fluffy kimono about her narrow waist.

"Come and sit down," Johnny said.

Celia shook her golden head and smiled. "I wouldn't dare, Johnny," she said.

"Why not?"

"I've only got a pair of panties on under this," She smiled at him coyly.

Johnny's heart missed a beat and he did what he could to justify whatever might happen. He felt that he was entitled to one last fling before settling down with Hat and since Celia was a very nice and a very pretty little girl, Johnny did not see what harm there was in it.

His eyes glittering, he said, "I won't hurt you. Come on and sit down."

Again Celia shook her yellow head. Slowly she opened the kimono and glanced down. "See?" she said childishly, "I'm not fully dressed."

Johnny did see. He saw two small, white and pink-crested breasts under a tiny brassiere, a flat little tummy and a pair of sheer, scant panties. Celia's long legs were bare and her thighs soft and very smooth. Johnny got up and came towards her. Celia closed the kimono.

"You picked a funny way of showing that you love him," Hat sneered.

Johnny's mouth was dry as tinder. "Celia," he whispered, "you're wonderful."

"I like you, too."

He started to put his arms about her but she backed away from him. Her eyes were sparkling and her lightly covered bosom rose and fell.

"Celia . . . "

"No, Johnny. Not here. Come to my apartment and we'll have some petting."

Johnny forgot all about the time, the test radio program, Hat . . . everything. He was tired out from overwork and all he could think of was relaxation. He nodded.

"Go get dressed," he said curtly.

At the door Celia hesitated. "Remember this, Johnny," she said. "I've been crazy about you ever since I joined the band. It's broken my heart that you've never given me a tumble."

"Get dressed!" Johnny voice was harsh and it was all he could do to keep his weary eyes open.

IT WAS AFTER midnight when Celia rose from the divan in front of the fire. Johnny lolled in a corner, his eyes half closed.

"You wait here, honey," Celia said, "I'll be back in a minute." Her form-fitting evening gown rustling, she hurried into the adjoining room.

Johnny did not hear the grating of the key in the lock and he did not hear the door open. He did not hear Hat dismiss the bellboy with the pass key and he did not hear her enter the room and walk to the center of the room. The first thing he did hear was a surprised gasp and he opened his eyes. Celia, wrapped revealingly in a filmy kimono, stood in the entrance to the other room, staring at Hat's severe face.

Hat broke the trenchant silence. "You know what I think of you, Celia Sears," she said coldly.

Celia dropped her eyes. "I can guess," she said miserably.

"Vargas put you up to this, didn't he?" Celia did not answer and Hat crossed to Johnny. She bent over him and then straightened. "You did a good job," she said. "He's tighter than hell."

"He had two drinks," Celia said.

"Tired as he was . . . you little . . . "

Celia came to her and her pretty face was working. "Listen," she said desperately. "Don't think too badly of me. I've been crazy about Johnny ever since I joined the band and he wouldn't look at me. When Vargas asked me to do this I agreed to get revenge on him." There were tears in her eyes. "But when I went to Johnny's dressing room after the show tonight —it wasn't because I wanted revenge. When I brought him here—it wasn't because I wanted revenge. It was because I loved him."

"You picked a funny way of showing it," Hat sneered. "You know that his only chance of getting the commercial broadcast is by playing his 'Melody in F' number, and now he's so tight he couldn't play chopsticks."

CELIA COLLAPSED in a beautiful heap on a chair and burst into tears. Hat felt sorry for the little fool and jerked Johnny to his feet. He grinned feebly at her.

"Hat," he said, "I'm so darned tired."

"Come on. I've got to get you sober. Somehow."

She took him to a nearby restaurant and poured redhot coffee down his throat. She made him drink a prairie oyster and she made him ride in the taxi with his head out of the window.

By the time they reached the studio, nobody would have known that Johnny was tight and as they went up in the elevator, Hat whispered,

"How d'you feel?"

"Hat—I'm a fool and you're a darling. I feel fine. I can play all the numbers on the program but the 'Melody in F'. I can't play that."

"You've got to!" Hat hissed. "Without that —the rest of the numbers don't mean a thing."

Johnny shrugged his shoulders. "I can't and that's all there is to it."

"You've got to! Somehow."

They stepped into the passageway and there was Vargas and his band. If he was surprised at the sight of an apparently sober Johnny Turner, he did not say anything. He just sneered and made some remark under his breath.

Everything in the studio was in readiness. Microphones had been set up, the announcer was there and the engineers were in the control room waiting for the station to sign off. Johnny sat down at the piano and ran his fingers over the keys.

"With everything you've got," Hat said tensely. "You've got about five minutes to rehearse 'Melody in F' before we go to the coast."

Johnny concentrated then set to work and it was terrible. Nobody said anything and he stuck to it. Sweat broke out on his forehead and Hat was trembling. He played the 'Melody in F' but his rendition of it would not have got him a job in a beer hall.

He looked up desperately at Hat, was about to say something when the announcer said,

"Stand by!"

THE SWEEPING SECOND hand of the electric clock hit two minutes past one and the announcer signalled. Automatically, instinctively Johnny struck the opening cords of the signature melo-

and the program was going through the wires California.

Hat waited until the announcer had made his nouncement and introduced the first number en, when she had seen him signal to cut his icrophone, she ran to him and whispered,

"Where does 'Melody in F' come on the program?"

The announcer sifted through his copy. "Third own." Hat darted out of the studio.

The fatal moment came and Hat stood by e of the turntables. The teamwork was beauful. She signalled to the engineer who inantly cut the orchestra mikes and opened the rntable mike. It started to revolve and Johnny's vn recording of 'Melody in F' went to Calirnia just as clear as though he were actually aying it.

HAT AND JOHNNY stood alone in the deserted fice. "That's that," Hat said efficiently. "You've t the job and you're going to get a wife who'll so be your manager."

"Am I forgiven?"

"Yes."

Then she was in his arms and hers were about s neck. Into his ear, she whispered, "When u first met me, I was like Celia. I thought u said you liked the way I'd filled out?"

Johnny's awkward kisses and endearments ere fumbling. They answered her. Succintly d in no uncertain manner.

MONEY MAD

By

Ken Cooper

DIANA was in her shower when she heard the insistent knock at her door. She turned the water off, reached for a towel.

"Just a minute."

Hurriedly, she wiped her lithe, stunningly curved body, cradling the ripe cones of her breasts in the towel. Still damp in spots, she donned a cotton robe, wrapped it around her and went to the door.

A tall, painfully thin man wearing pince-nez and carrying a brief case, blinked when he saw her. "Er—Miss Farnum?" he queried.

He looked like the book salesman type. "I'm sorry, but I'm not buying anything today," Diana said, starting to close the door.

The thin man cleared his throat. "I—er—I'm not selling anything, Miss Farnum." He reached into his vest pocket and produced a card.

Diana took it, read it. It said: L. Lathrop Squiggins, Counsellor-At-Law. The engraving was rich.

Diana had no idea what L. Lathrop Squiggins' mission was, but common decency demanded that she ask him in. She did, with voluble excuses for her appearance.

The attorney entered the living room of her modest apartment and seated himself decorously on the edge of a chair. He adjusted his pince-nez and removed a sheaf of papers from his brief case.

"It is my pleasant duty to inform you, Miss Farnum, that in accordance with the terms of the will of the late Elisha Crumm, you have been left his entire estate amounting to well over one million dollars."

DIANA'S SHAPELY mouth gaped open. Her hands dropped weakly into her lap and the cotton robe came apart, exposing the inner rondures of her milky-white bosom. Mr. Squiggins coughed and looked away severely.

"Who—who is Elisha Crumm?" Diana gasped. "Why did he—"

"I shall explain everything, Miss Farnum," the lawyer said. "Mr. Crumm was an aged eccentric who believed that money was intended to be spent, not saved. During his lifetime he disposed of almost a billion dollars. When he died there was approximately one million left. According to the terms of his will, his attorney was to choose a beneficiary by lot. Your name, together with ninety-nine others, was chosen from the telephone directory and placed in a hat. You are the fortunate beneficiary."

"You mean—you mean I'm to get a million dollars?"

"Providing you live up to the terms of the will. Mr. Crumm wished to assure himself that whoever received the money would spend it. He specified that the fortunate individual would receive the sum of $5,000 in cash, said sum to be spent within 24 hours of receipt. If the $5,000 is spent in purchases of not more than $100 each, you will receive the entire estate. If not, the estate reverts to Mr. Crumm's legal heir. I expect you to appear at my office tomorrow at ten in the morning with receipted bills attesting to your having spent the money legitimately."

Diana sat like a graven image while L. Lathrop Squiggins counted fifty $100 bills into her outstretched hand. They were new, crisp bills and they crackled melodiously.

He was at the door, hat in hand. "Ten o'clock tomorrow morning, Miss Farnum," he said.

LONG AFTER HE had gone, Diana sat staring at the money in her hand. She couldn't believe it was real—either the money or the fantastic idea. And yet, there it was, right in the palm of her hand—$5,000 in cash.

She pinched herself to make certain it wasn't all a dream. The pinch hurt. Now she had to find out whether the money was good or not. Maybe L. Lathrop Squiggins was a crank who went around handing out phoney money. Diana examined one of the bills. It looked all right. The quickest way to find out would be to take it to a bank. She rushed into her bedroom and began to dress with frantic haste.

She was putting color on her lips when a knock sounded at the door. Diana's heart sank. She had visions of L. Lathrop Squiggins returning to tell her it was all a mistake. Trembling, she answered the knock. A young, good looking man smiled at her across the threshold.

"Good morning," he said. "Would you be interested in a fine grade of sheer silk stockings. They're only—"

"I'm sorry, miss, but I can't accept it. It's against the company rules."

"You've got to accept it!"

He grinned. "Something wrong with the bill?"

"Of course not! It's perfectly good! Here, look at it."

He took the bill and studied it carefully. "Looks all right, but you can't tell these days. They make some good counterfeits. I've got my car outside. I'll drive you over to the bank if you want me to."

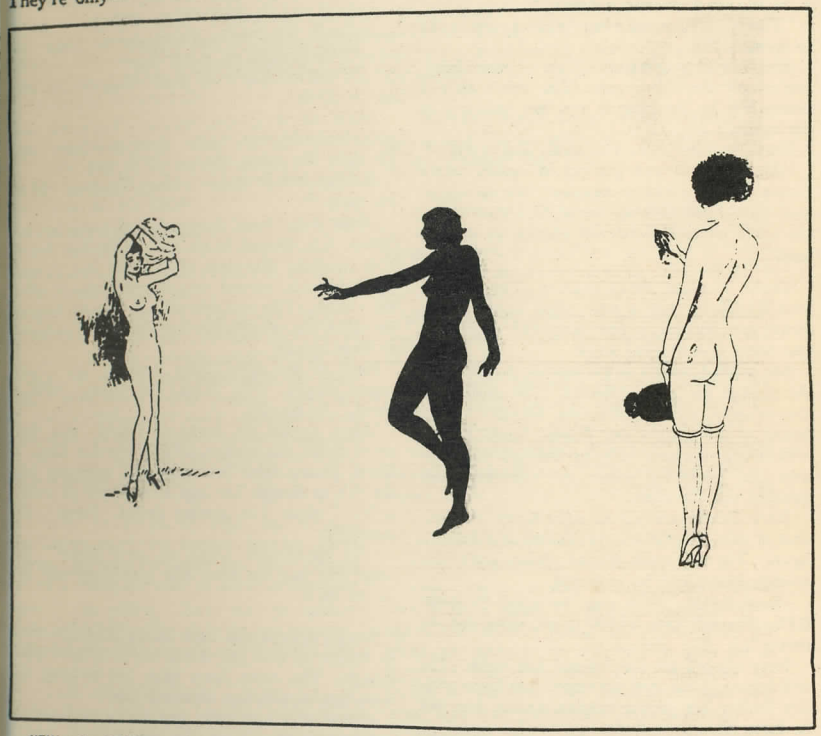
"Thank you very much."

In the car, Diana introduced herself. So did the young man. His name was Jerry Devlin. At the bank, Jerry stood next to her while a teller verified each of the notes.

"See," Diana said. "They're all good!"

"You sound surprised."

"Well, I am!" She was dying to tell some-



"I'll take $100 worth!" Diana gasped. She ran back to the bedroom, got her purse and extracted one of the crisp bills. "Here, take it and give me a receipt."

The young man evinced surprise. "Well—er—this is rather unusual. I'm afraid I can't accept that large a sum. I'll have the stockings delivered to you and you can pay for them when they come."

"But I want to pay for them now," Diana insisted. "I *must* pay for them now!"

one of her good fortune. It was welling up within her, ready to burst out.

"You didn't find the money, did you?" Jerry asked.

"Practically. I'll tell you all about it out in the car."

SHE RECITED THE STORY from beginning to end. When she was through, Jerry shook his head in amazement. "And you've got to spend it all by ten tomorrow morning?"

"That's right. Can you think of any ways to spend it?"

Jerry's eyes brightened. "Can I? Say, baby, you've got the right man. You won't have a penny left by morning if you put yourself in my hands."

Diana beamed. "Do you mean that, Jerry?"

"Absolutely. I can get rid of money faster than a perpetual motion machine. We can spend half the $5,000 touring the night clubs. Why, the cover charges alone will amount to a thousand!"

EIGHT O'CLOCK THAT evening found Diana with $4,400 in cash, a new white satin evening gown, new slippers, a new wrap and everything that went with evening attire.

She studied herself in the mirror, pleased with the picture the glass reflected. The gown was the *ne plus ultra* of decollete brevity. What bodice it had hugged her plump, round breasts with loving adhesion, outlining their globular fullness and puckering where the rigid pinnacles punched out the cloth.

Jerry Devlin arrived at eight-thirty, resplendent in tails. His brown eyes darted over Diana's figure. The hot pupils dilated. "Gee, you're absolutely beautiful," he enthused.

Diana sighed. "We only managed to spend $600. We still have $4,400 to go. How can we ever—"

Jerry slipped an arm around her waist. The stiff bosom of his shirt prevented him from actually feeling her jutting breasts against him but he knew they were there.

"You leave it to Jerry," he said cheerfully. "That money will be gone by morning."

Diana placed her hands on his shoulders. Now that she thought of it, Jerry was a handsome boy. Particularly in tails. She swayed closer to him, let her hips touch his. A wave of warmth swept over her body, brought tingling sensations to her.

"I'm counting on you, Jerry," she said softly, smiling up at him. "Couldn't I pay you a hundred dollars for a kiss?" Her eyes teased.

"You can have that for nothing," Jerry said, swooping down and taking possession of her lips with his mouth.

Diana thrilled to the caress. She knew his hand was sliding over her hip and charmingly contoured back but she didn't stop it. Jerry stepped back.

"We'd better get going. There's a big night ahead of us."

AT THE EXCLUSIVE *Club Verlaine*, Jerry studied the wine list and ordered the most expensive champagne he could find.

"It's $30 a bottle," he said. "Ten bottles will eat up $300."

Diana was in seventh heaven. "Let's not talk about it, Jerry," she said. "Lets just have fun. I'll leave the money matter up to you."

He patted her hand. "Okay, darling. Shall we dance?"

Diana didn't need champagne to bring intoxication. Just floating in his arms made her drunk with emotion. The palm of his hand, hot against her bare back, seemed to give off thrilling electric shocks. The pressure of her breasts against his chest was responsible for sensations galvanic in their nature.

Back at the table, Jerry ordered the champagne poured. "To Diana, the young millionairess," he toasted.

Diana sipped the bubbling liquid. She had never tasted champagne before, but she liked it. Three glasses later her head was spinning and she felt as though her legs were made of putty.

"I—I think I'm getting drunk, Jerry," she mumbled.

"No you're not. Come on, let's dance." He lifted her into his arms and almost carried her to the floor.

DIANA RESTED HER head on his shoulder, tried to follow as best she could, but it wasn't good enough. The more Jerry spun her around, the more her equilibrium deserted her.

At the table again she just about managed to make the chair. "Jerry, I'm drunk!"

"Nonsense. Here, take another drink." He filled her glass. "That'll fix you up."

"No more, Jerry. My head—my head is reeling."

"How about a walk around the block?"

Diana groaned. "I—I can't even stand up."

"We'll fix that." Somehow, Jerry got her up and into her wrap and out to a taxi.

Once she was settled on the seat, Diana lurched against him. "Oh, Jerry, I'm so dizzy."

He put an arm around her waist, got his hand under the wrap. Slowly and gently he began to caress her, working his fingers over her bare back and into the vent at the arm-hole of her gown. Diana could almost feel the hot rush of blood to her head. She was ready to throw convention to the winds.

"Kiss me, Jerry," she murmured.

Jerry kissed her lips, her throat and the delightfully soft hollow at the base of her neck. Diana's warm, rapid breath fanned his mouth ecstatically. She twined her arms about his neck and sighed, every nerve in her gloriously young body crying out in response.

THE TAXI PULLED up before Diana's apartment. Jerry helped her up the steps and into her living room. He relieved her of her wrap, sat her down on the divan.

"You feel better now, don't you?" he questioned.

Diana stretched out on the divan, ran her hands down the front of her body.

"Jerry," she gasped. "Come to me, Jerry."

He kneeled beside her, touched his lips to her moist mouth. His fingers gently stroked her silken hair, his fingers tips toyed with her shell-pink ears, soft kisses were pressed upon her closed eyelids. Diana had never permitted a man such liberties but she reached for Jerry, dragged him toward her, buried his face in the throbbing roundness of her shoulder.

THE SUN, SLANTING through the window, blinded Diana when she awoke. She sat up on the divan, blinked wonderingly. Her evening dress was a crumpled heap of satin on the floor.

"Jerry!" she called. There was no answer. Her eyes traveled to the clock on the secretary. Nine-thirty! She had to be at the lawyer's office at ten!

She leaped from the divan and ran into the bedroom. There was no time to think about what had happened to Jerry. She dressed in five minutes and dashed out of the apartment, praying that Jerry would be at the lawyer's office when she got there.

L. Lathrop Squiggins peered at her over his pince-nez glasses when she dashed into his office. "I see you are on time, Miss Farnum," he said. "You have the necessary receipts and sales tickets with you?"

Diana swallowed hard. "Er—a friend of mine has them. He should be here any minute now."

L. Lathrop Squiggins removed a watch from his vest pocket. "It is now two minutes to ten, Miss Farnum. According to the terms of Mr. Crumm's will, I—"

"Oh, but he'll be here, Mr. Squiggins! I know he will!" Diana wished she was as positive as she sounded.

"We'll wait the two minutes, Miss Farnum. Have a seat."

Diana couldn't sit. She paced the floor nervously, wondering what had happened to Jerry. She remembered feeling faint in his arms—from champagne. What happened after that was a blank.

"The two minutes are up, Miss Farnum," the lawyer said. "I am sorry, but the estate reverts to Mr. Crumm's legal heir."

TEARS WELLED IN Diana's eyes and rolled down her cheeks. She opened her purse to get a handkerchief, found the $4,400 in cash. Jerry hadn't spent it as he had promised to do! He had failed her! Made her lose a million dollars!

Mr. Squiggins pressed a button. A girl entered the office. "Tell Mr. Devlin to come in," he directed.

Diana heard the name and spun around just as Jerry, smiling broadly, stepped into the office. "Hello, Diana," he greeted. "Feeling okay?"

Diana was speechless with rage. Mr. Squiggins cleared his throat. "The estate of your deceased uncle reverts to you, Mr. Devlin," he said.

"You mean to us," Jerry corrected.

"I—er—don't understand."

Jerry looped an arm around Diana's waist. "It's all very simple. I set out yesterday morning to see that this young lady didn't spend the $500. as directed in my uncle's will. As it happened, she didn't, but I've become so attached to her that I've decided to share the estate with her, providing—" He hesitated.

"Providing what?" Mr. Squiggins wanted to know.

"Providing she consents to sharing it legally. Answer yes or no," he said, lifting Diana's chin.

"You mean—you mean—"

"Answer yes or no!"

"Yes."

It was the first time anyone had ever kissed anyone else in the cloistered privacy of L. Lathrop Squiggins' office. The lawyer blushed and turned away.

She Didn't Know Bill

By

Bill Storm

NOW or never!" Marcia Brooks said, pursing her ripe red lips into a frown of determination. "I've had Bill Simms on the hook now for six months, and still the big lug won't ask me to marry him. I can't stand it any longer. The man's driving me nuts. If this plan of ours doesn't work out right, I'm going to marry the first man that will have me and retire from active circulation!"

Bee Ellingwood lay on the bed, one slender enticing leg crossed over its mate, a symphony of alluring white flesh and nerve-shattering curves. Marcia stopped to stare at her, seemed to notice for the first time just what a lovely dynamic little thing this city cousin of hers was. Her eyes roved over the upthrust peaks of her firm, generous breasts that were all alert with nervous motion and down over the swelling taper of her hips. Bee's glove fitting black singlette was not designed to detract from the beauty of slinky, lyred hips and satiny, ivory-tinted skin.

"Sa-a-y!" Marcia drawled. "How do I know Bill won't fall for you and upset everything? Or how do I know that you won't fall for him? If things turn out the way we plan, you two will be together most of the evening—and if he should happen to get a load of what I see right now the big ape might forget me entirely. I think we'd better call it off—"

"And then you never will know whether he loves you or not!" Bee pointed out. "What's the trouble, Mart—don't you really trust me? Say, I wouldn't have your country boy if he was served up on a platter with his pockets stuffed with gold nuggets! It takes a man who knows his stuff to get me interested. A man of parts. A man of the world. A man with hell-fire popping out of his eyes."

"You almost convince me," Marcia answered doubtfully. "The trouble is, you haven't seen my Bill, yet."

BEE SHRUGGED. SHE rose and placed her hands on Marcia's plump white shoulders, turning her around slowly Her eyes fell on Marcia's firm rondures then dropped to her flat tu

"What have I got that you haven't?" wondered. "All you need my dumb little c is a bit of sophistication. Don't throw yo into his arms! Don't offer him your kisses! him work for them! And when he finally int you, he'll be so delighted with his conquest he'll want to marry you right away."

"You talk a swell necking party," Marcia doubtfully, "but you don't know Bill. Pr me, Bee, that if the big palooka should h to revive and act human, you won't take a tage of him!"

"Oh, I promise!" Bee yawned. "Say, w this other fellow's name, this champion that you're going out with?"

"Bill Barry," Marcia answered shortly. " they say he's a handsome devil, too—big lanky and blonde—only I wouldn't kno hope he doesn't get ambitious and get fre should hate to have Bill find us in too affecti a situation. Instead of making him je enough to wake up to the fact that he might me, he might walk out on me for good."

"It's almost time to get started," Bee wa "Now let's get things straight. I'm to let find me here. You're going to meet his f Barry and invite him to take you skating the river. In about an hour I'm going to Bill to take me skating. We skate down abo mile where I see the light of a little camp the shore. I feel tired and suggest to Bill we visit the camp for a hot drink or someth We find you and Barry in each other's a Then Bill realizes what he has lost, he goes wire, takes you by the hair and gives you t days to marry him—after he has beaten up two-timing friend. Right?"

"Oh, I hope so," Marcia shivered. "Only—"

Bee pushed her firmly toward the door. " have got to hurry and get dressed, darling! six already. You're sure the folks won't ch their minds and return tonight?"

"They're staying with Aunt Hetty until morrow night—we've got a clear coast," Ma said. "Only—"

BEE PUSHED HER out and closed the door. Fifteen minutes later she called a shaky "Goodbye" and Bee heard the front door slam.

Bee powder-dusted her trim body. She smiled gleefully when she thought of Marcia's carefully worked out plan. Marcia had always been a selfish little beast. Bee should have known when she got her invitation to spend the week-end with her that her pretty little cousin was thinking of her own gain.

Well, Bee would keep her promise. She would not take advantage of Marcia's Bill. But she could—and would—have some fun! Bee was adept in the art of lovemaking, but working on a country bumpkin who ran a sporting goods store and talked only of skates and skiis and guns might be interesting. At least, it would be novel!

So instead of putting on a dress, Bee donned a slinky negligee of white opalescent satin, arranging the folds so that a low triangle of creamy flesh was exposed down into the deep valley of her nubile breasts. She slipped sheer flesh-tinted chiffon stockings on her graceful legs and tied pink ribbon bands around the tops. Lace edged pink scanties completed her dress. She gazed at herself and the mirror and smiled softly as little devilish thrills twitched at her nerves and stirred her blood.

Bee brushed her exquisitely marceled hair and let it ripple in a golden cascade about her shoulders. She wafted a spray of exotic perfume—one of her few real luxuries—over her tremendous bosom. She used lipstick deftly, making her sensuously curved lips into a virile, crimson cupid's bow. Then, humming a gay little tune, she drifted down into the parlor to wait.

SHE HAD HARDLY seated herself on the divan and picked up the magazine section of a Sunday

"You talk a swell necking party," Marcia said doubtfully, "but you don't know Bill!"

paper to pretend to read when the front door opened and Bill strode in. Standing in the doorway he blinked at Bee's alluringly draped figure as though it were a mirage.

Bee rose, gazing at him with a curious feeling of uncertainty tugging at her nerves. He was different, all right. But something told her that that difference was all to the good!

He was wearing a loose fitting suit of gray tweed and from the very careless ease of its fit Bee knew that it was expensively tailored. His blonde hair had a rumpled look that harmonized perfectly with the rugged quality of his weather tanned face. Bee had already decided that he was quite plain looking. Then he stepped toward her and she discovered with a rush of fluttery excitement that he was really handsome. His expression registered such a mixture of strength and shyness, boldness and reserve, that she felt bewildered, uncertain about what was coming next!

"You're Bee, I suppose? Glad to know you. I'm Bill," he greeted soberly, extending a huge lean paw.

Bee let her hand fall into his. His clasp was warm and firm—while it lasted. Her breath began to flutter. Vaguely she remembered her promise to Marcia that she would not allow him to become *too* interested in her. And then she thought, Good grief! If he looks at me that way with those wistful blue eyes of his, I'm lost. I stand about as much chance as a cone of ice cream in the sun—

Bee dropped down to the divan again and crossed her legs. Bill sat on the edge of a couch opposite her. He didn't look exactly uncomfortable. But he did look as though he were not quite sure of what was expected of him.

"I had really expected to take Marcia skating," he said soberly, "but there seems to have been a quick change in plans. I'm glad," he concluded soberly.

"You don't act very enthusiastic," Bee prompted him, with a wicked little stab of elation quickening her pulse.

"Oh," Bill said. "I guess I should sit by you, or something. I—I guess I was hardly expecting to find a girl like you here."

HE CAME OVER slowly, gazed down at her for a moment. Bee returned his gaze. Her face colored the least bit when she noted that her negligee was gaping so that the upper rondures of her gorgeous breasts were visible.

"What—what kind of a girl did you expect to find?" she demanded huskily.

"Oh, I guess most any kind—except wh actually found." Suddenly his eyes seem glow with admiring flame. His voice ch husky—husky, but firm and purposeful same time.

"Most any kind, except a girl that I ha most insane desire to take in my arms and

He was beside her with the words a arm was around her waist. Bee forgot h vice to Marcia completely. Make him wo her kisses when she was just aching to herself at him, to feel the delight of hi lips on hers, to sense the excruciating deli his caresses.

Bee shivered and fitted herself into the of his shoulder. Immediately his mouth w hers and his arm was crushing her close she gasped for breath.

She felt his hand glide over the folds negligee as he drew her to him, but his ki drugging her into a blissful coma of he ness. She could only tremble, surge closer great chest, until the pounding of his hea transmitted to the resilient cushion of he tened breast.

Bee gasped when his fingers eased ov plump rondures of her shoulders. Her quickened and the throbbing rapture of almost like breath cutting stabs of pain.

"You've got to let me go!" she breathe steadily as his mouth tore loose from h make a burning trail into the warm hol her satiny mouth.

"I—I guess I should," he decided d "I'm behaving very abruptly considering t are complete strangers. Believe me, this happened to me before. You didn't mind so terribly?"

His voice was so unsteady and sincer Bee could hardly understand. Having apologize for kissing her was an entirel experience. And such a kiss!

"I didn't mind at all!" she told him s "I—I really wanted you to kiss me. I g shouldn't have told you that, should I? can't seem to help it!"

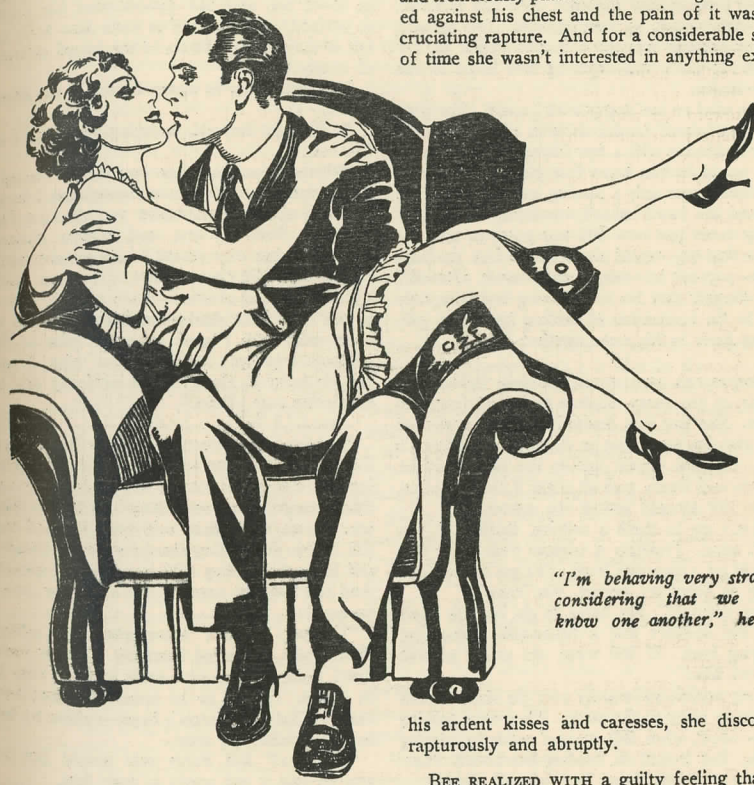
"I'm going to kiss you again," Bill w her with a slow deliberation that starte heart flip-flopping again.

BEE THOUGHT SHE was going to ave face. Instead, without the slightest hes she pressed her bruised lips to his. A time Bill found them charged with a very um of delight as his kiss sank between t

Bee found herself sliding into an abyss of searing, breath taking emotion as his fingers caressed their way down over her shoulders. She leaned away, but that only defeated her half formed purpose of preventing his seeing the emotion which showed in her eyes and her throbbing breasts.

"Bill—oh, Bill!" she gasped.

Bill was staring at her raptly. There was an



"I'm behaving very strangely considering that we don't know one another," he said.

ardency in his eyes that made her feel utterly, hopelessly, and too delightfully lost!

"Darling," he murmured, as though he had made the most wonderful discovery in the world. "Darling, you're beautiful! Did—did you don this dress for me? So that I could see the loveliness, the utterly intoxicating beauty of you? If I thought you did, I'd be so crazily happy—"

"Yes, Bill, I dressed for you!" Bee panted. "Take me in your arms, love me! I'm crazy about you, darling! I didn't know they came like you or I'd have come to Cedar Brook long ago!"

His hand swept over her deeply arched back, ran along her side, found the soft hollow under her arm. With a deep sigh Bee surged against him. Their lips fused again and her arms drew him fiercely down to her. She was trembling like an aspen and her lips had grown liquid-like and tremulously pliant. Her throbbing heart rested against his chest and the pain of it was excruciating rapture. And for a considerable space of time she wasn't interested in anything except his ardent kisses and caresses, she discovered rapturously and abruptly.

BEE REALIZED WITH a guilty feeling that she was just two hours late in getting Bill started for the river. Bill had to stop at the shop for his skates and that used up another ten minutes. Bee was still tingling with the tantalizing urges when he put her skates on for her. She was seated on a log and when she let her fingers comb tenderly through the blond locks he hugged her knees against his chest while he kissed her too willing lips.

Bee finally stood up, lovely and radiant in the moonlight. A red beret set jauntily on the side of her honey-colored head, a white woolen sweater that swelled enticingly over her generous breasts, and a short skirt that whipped intriguingly above her rounded knees, did not detract an atom from her galvanic effect upon Bill every time that he looked at her. His hands closed over hers warmly and they swung off down the glimmering silver ribbon of ice.

Bee tried to slow the pace. She had to think. She didn't want to face Marcia. The thought of her promise was like a leaden weight on her mind. If there was anything Bee hated it was a two-timer.

She tried to feel angry with herself. She tried to force herself to the decision of turning Bill over to Marcia with a few joking, careless words that would let him know that the past two hours of Heaven was only a passing interlude with her. Instead, she found herself wondering with frightening doubt just how Bill was going to take the scene that she would shortly lead him to. Suppose—suppose he really loved Marcia, after all? The thought that his love-making had been only due to the fascination of holding her white, pulsating body in his arms terrified her.

BEFORE SHE REALIZED it, the dimly lighted rectangle of the camp window beckoned from the shore. She had just decided in a little spasm of fear that she would not go through with Marcia's plan, that she would ignore the camp and let Marcia and Barry wait all night if they cared to, when Bill himself settled the matter.

"Let's go in there a minute, darling, if you don't mind. Probably a trapper lives there that I could get a cigarette from. I've got to do something to quiet my nerves, you know!"

Bee hesitated. She hated to go, but she knew that she couldn't find a reasonable excuse for hanging back. If Bill went, she might as well go with him.

They walked awkwardly over the short stretch of frozen snow to the camp. They were passing the window, when Bill stopped suddenly, staring inside. Bee looked in, holding her breath. Marcia was certainly doing her part all right!

Bee's fingers clasped over Bill's arm. She saw his face grow ruddy. She felt him tremble as she pressed protectingly against him.

"Don't take it so hard, Bill darling!" she whispered. "Marcia doesn't mean a bit of that. It was all a frame up. Believe me, please. Marcia and I planned it. I'll tell you about it on the way back. Only—only let's go!"

They started back silently, skating slowly. Bee hated to talk about it. But he had told her that he loved her, and had demonstrated his words so perfectly, that she had to know how badly he felt at discovering Marcia in the fervid embrace of another man.

"Are you going to marry Marcia?" she asked bluntly.

At that, he stopped, swinging her around to face him.

"Whatever put that into your head?" he asked wonderingly. "You know, sweetheart, I haven't been able to understand you the last few minutes. Evidently you and Marcia planned something, but why should I care whether she's sincere with Bill Gray, or not? Of course, Bill's a business friend of mine—that's why I'm here—to put on a little skating exhibition for him to boost sales—but I can't expect to take on his personal troubles. Besides, from what I just saw, it looks as though he is perfectly able to handle his own affairs."

A FLASH OF INTUITION flooded Bee's mind. Swiftly she flung her arms around his neck, giving him a kiss that started him shaking. It was clear enough, now—everything! At the last minute, Marcia had gotten cold feet. She had sent Bill Barry, the skating champion, to the house—and had gone skating with her own Bill instead. And she had not cared a rap about the consequences!

"Darling, I don't know what I'm talking about!" she whispered hurriedly. "I only know that I want to be in your arms again. I want to be kissed. I want to be loved—No—not here darling! Back to Marcia's house—where we can be comfortable and cozy—"

"Let's go!" Bill Barry said simply. But the way he said it put wings in their feet.

"Nice Work, Mitzi!"

By Del Copp

IT was not only a private party that Mitzi found going on at Hal Benton's huge and luxurious apartment; it was a whole series of private parties. She held her breath as she eased in, hoping that no one would notice her.

Two couples were necking in separate corners of the reception room and Mitzi's big blue eyes grew bigger and bluer still, as she witnessed the shocking techinque of their amative display. She recognized a voluptuous blonde as Marge Withers, Hal's latest flame, and decided that the man she was with must be a very close and personal friend of the millionaire playboy from the privileges he was taking!

Mitzi centered her attention on Marge for a few moments, noting how the blonde girl insinuated her manifold charms upon the groggy attention of her partner. She was wearing a black satin gown that hugged the taper of her big slinky hips and revealed the milky whiteness of her big round bosom. Her skirt had slipped over her knees, displaying her firm, beautifully molded thighs to where lace edged panties hugged their satin softness. Even as Mitzi watched, Marge fused her soft sensuous lips to the man's mouth. She saw them shiver together, saw his arm curve avidly around her waist and Marge's huge breasts flatten against his chest.

The cold shivers that had been chasing themselves the length of Mitzi's spine suddenly vanished. The atmosphere of the place was certainly a cure for a cold temperament, she thought.

A man came out of the music room and stood for a moment in the entrance, blinking his eyes as though trying to get his bearings. From the way Marge Withers pulled abruptly out of her partner's arms Mitzi knew that the inebriated third man was Hal Benton himself.

SHE WATCHED HIM breathlessly for a moment, uneasily aware of the warmish, tingling sensations emanating from somewhere around her heart and thrilling through her whole body. Gee, but he was a handsome lug, with his lean, tanned face, dark glossy hair and penetrating eyes. She noticed the width of his shoulders and the athletic slimness of his waist. Mitzi found herself shivering again, not so much this time with apprehension as with anticipation!

For abruptly, Hal Benton shrugged and turned his glance away from Marge. His eyes finally came to rest upon Mitzi herself, standing forlornly by the door.

He strode over, glancing at her face curiously. Then he smiled. He started to chuckle. And Mitzi's face flamed when she recalled that she really wasn't Mitzi Manners at all. Of course he'd laugh at her—anyone would laugh at the way she had made herself up.

For Mitzi's small kissable mouth was rouged into a heavy curved slash *a la* Martha Raye, the warm color of her smooth, girlishly oval face made pallid with powder, and the thin delicate tracery of her silky eyebrows completely obliterated with heavy black crescents. Mitzi's lovely face was not exactly clownish. As a matter of fact, it was not exactly anything!

She saw Hal's amused and puzzled eyes rove over the flattened curves of her body, little dreaming that her gorgeous breasts were crushed flatly under the tight lacing of an unaccustomed brassiere, and that a bunchy girdle had done angular and unflattering things to her sinuous waist and lyred hips.

"Well, look what's blown in!" Marge said loudly from the divan, obviously glad of the chance to distract Hal's attention from her too open dalliance.

Hal turned immediately, his eyes flashing dangerously.

"What's the trouble—don't you like her?" he demanded.

Marge walked over, hips swaying, breasts all shivery motion.

"What an odd number, darling!" she cooed. "You invited her to entertain us, of course. Well, tell her to go into her act, Hal. I'm anxious to see what such an obvious freak can do!"

Hal pushed Marge away, ungallantly but forcibly.

"I've forgotten what I invited her for," he said with a puzzled look, "but anyway, she's here and I like her. I've been friendly with beautiful girls—take a bow, Marge—and I'm getting fed up with them—take another bow, Marge. Now I'm going to discover what the other kind is like!

"I like your eyes, sister!" he said abruptly, turning to Mitzi again. "Pay no attention to what my flighty girl friend has been saying, the idea being to frighten you away. Want a drink?"

"I—I wouldn't mind," Mitzi agreed. "You're awfully kind—"

"Not at all. Come with me, please—I want to talk to you!"

"I'll let you stay awhile if you promise to be good," Marge said slowly.

MITZI FOLLOWED HIM through the dimly lit music room which had been turned into a lovers' retreat, and on through to a corridor, without even being noticed. Hal opened a door and pushed her into a small lounge connected with his sleeping quarters. He closed the door and walked to a liquor cabinet. He mixed cocktails deftly, handed Mitzi a glass.

"Here's to you—the other kind of girl!" he toasted solemnly.

Mitzi downed her cocktail without blinking, felt the warm, exhilarating effect of the gin creeping through her tightly laced body.

"You're a queer little thing," Hal mused, setting down his glass. He lowered himself to a *chaise longue* and pulled her down beside him. Mitzi sat stiffly on the edge, trying without very much success to keep cool. His fingers still rested on her wrist, carelessly, easily, but the contact of them against her soft flesh started her pulse drumming. If she didn't watch out, she wouldn't even get started on the job that she had to do!

"Tell me," Hal said, his dark eyes mildly curious, "what do girls like you do for entertainment? I mean, what's your idea above love? Would you expect to get paid for every kiss from the man you love?—Or aren't you in love with anyone?"

"I—I don't know—no man has ever wanted to kiss me!" Mitzi lied breathlessly. "But I'm sure I shouldn't expect anything else from a—a sweetheart if he wanted to kiss me. Why?"

Hal grinned at her, but his lips quickly sobered.

"Then I'm going to give you a new experience! I'm going to make love to you. I'm going to kiss you—and for every kiss, I'm going to pay you. Let's see—every kiss that I've given Marge has cost me probably fifty dollars, maybe more. But Marge is in love with me, so that makes it easier for her. You're not, therefore letting me kiss you should be considerably higher. I'm going to double the amount. I may not kiss you more than once, I may kiss you all night. I don't know—But here's the first one!

"I've had my fling," Hal said. "I don't want to be a playboy any longer."

Mitzi held her breath as she gazed down at his sombre eyes. It gave her a stab of elation to discover that he was not drunk, as she had thought at first. She wondered what kind of brain storm was passing back of his troubled eyes. She thought she knew. . . .

SHE ROSE QUICKLY just as his arm started to encircle her waist. For Mitzi knew darned well that once his hard, virile lips touched hers she was lost. And unless she kept her head and did the work that had been assigned to her, she'd be out of a job so quick that it was painful to think about it.

"What's the trouble—don't you want to be kissed?" Hal demanded with a trace of surprise.

"It isn't that," Mitzi countered. "But you're just laughing at me—you're just trying to satisfy a whim."

Hal was on his feet, walking toward her. Mitzi saw there was no escape. She closed her eyes as his arm went around her waist. She felt acute disappointment that there was no more ardor in his embrace. He tilted her head back and then his lips were resting lightly on hers.

Mitzi held her breath. Thrills shot through her, making her tremble. Her blood started to race hotly through her body. She was just about to obey the uncontrollable impulse to throw her arms around his neck and let him feel what a real kiss was like, when a soft rap sounded on the door.

"Hal, darling—let me in!" Marge's voice cooed softly. "I've missed you, darling—"

"Quick—in the bedroom with you!" Hal ordered Mitzi. "If she finds us here alone there'll be hell to pay!"

Mitzi hesitated just long enough to let him see that she went unwillingly, then allowed him to grasp her arm and hustle her in. He closed the door with a muttered order for her to keep quiet.

Mitzi knelt and peered through the keyhole. She saw Hal let Marge in, noticed the blonde's swift glance around the room. Then Marge pressed herself into his arms.

Mitzi's pulse beat sullenly as she saw Hal carry Marge in his arms to the *chaise longue*. But it seemed that Marge was in a recklessly amorous mood.

"It's stuffy in here, darling! I'm going to take off my gown. Little Hallie boy doesn't mind?"

"He's stupid if he can't see through a thing like that," Mitzi thought angrily. She saw Marge slip the shoulder straps down over her smooth, plump arms and give a little wiggle. The gown slithered to the floor.

"Like me?" Marge asked softly.

MITZI SAW HAL'S eyes glisten as they roved over the blonde's voluptuous white curves. He reached for her, but Marge moved toward the bedroom door so quickly that Mitzi almost fell backward. She had just time to dodge into a closet and pull the door shut when Marge slipped in, closing the door.

"I'm fagged, Hal darling—You don't mind if I take a little shut-eye? I'll let you talk to me a few minutes, if you'll promise to be good!"

Hal came in, took Marge in his arms. Mitzi saw with a pang of exasperation that he had forgotten her completely.

Mitzi saw him kiss her, saw Marge's sensuous lips open. He held her so close that their bodies seemed one.

"That freak—what did you do with her?" Marge asked.

"I sent her away—I can't be bothered engaging servants at a time like this," Hal answered carelessly. "You lie down, baby—I'm going out to get rid of the gang out there. Then we'll have the place to ourselves."

Marge clung to him, her big bosom rising and falling rapidly.

"There's no need, Hallie boy—I sent them off myself. Love me?"

Hal's answer was another kiss. If they kept on doing that Mitzi knew that she'd have to barge out and tear out a few handfulls of the blonde's carefully bleached hair.

Marge eased out of his arms and dropped down to the bed. She draped her partially naked form with studied sensuousness and lifted her arms. Her greenish eyes gleamed excitedly. Mitzi held her breath, while her fingers flew nimbly over the buttons of her plain serge dress. She stepped out of it, kicked it into a corner. Then off came the restraining bandeau and girdle, and Mitzi crouched like an inspired goddess, drawing deep silent breaths as her firm while breasts flexed gratefully.

HAL'S ARMS WERE just swooping around Marge's recumbent form when Mitzi threw open the door, glaring like an outraged naiad. Hal jacked upright, blue eyes staring in amazement. Mitzi saw the look of angry bewilderment on the blonde's flushed face, then she faced Hal.

"You'll pay for this!" she said tensely. "You thought you'd gotten rid of me tonight, but I fooled you, see? I'm not quite the simple little fool you thought me. I believed you—almost—when you told me you loved me, or I wouldn't be here like this! But you'll pay—plenty! Telling me you didn't care for this woman—that she forced herself on you and you had to put up with her! Well, I could see tonight just how much she had to force herself on you—"

"Wait a minute!" Marge had finally found her voice and it was pretty shrill. She was staring at Mitzi and fire seemed to blaze from her eyes.

"He told you that, huh! Told you he didn't care for me—and all the while he was fooling around with you. Why you two-timing lug!" She turned wrathfully upon the astounded Hal. But she controlled her anger swiftly. Her voice was very coherent. There was no doubt that she knew what she was talking about:

"Well, I'm the one that's going to collect—not this dizzy little simpleton! I've got proof that you tried to fool me into loving you. So you thought you were putting something over all the time, huh? Well they don't come any more that can take little Marge for a ride! I've saved your letters— every one of them! And I saved them for this very purpose. I'm leaving, big boy—and my lawyer will call in the morning! You'd better talk with him. If you don't, your old man will cough up plenty!"

MARGE SAILED OUT into the lounge and cooly slipped into her gown. Hal seemed to be dumbfounded. His eyes went from the blond to Mitzi. There was a cold gleam of anger creeping into them that made Mitzi shiver. He followed her into the lounge just as Marge's fingers curled over the door knob.

"I'd think it over a bit, Marge!" Mitzi drawled carelessly. "Maybe I wouldn't send my lawyer to collect from Hal, after all. In fact, if I were you, I'm sure I wouldn't—not with a husband still living—you know, the one in Los Angeles who refuses to give you an annulment!"

Marge's face went pale. She started to speak, but it seemed that she couldn't find her voice at all, this time. She was trembling when she finally got the door open.

"It's all right, dearie," Mitzi called after her. "I know what you want to say, and it isn't nice. Besides I wouldn't believe a thing you called me. Good night—and give my regards to your lawyer!"

Mitzi's emotions were in such a jumble that she hardly knew what she was doing. She was only conscious of Hal's blazing, angry eyes upon her as she walked to the mirror and began rubbing the make-up from her face. She saw her reflection and her heart fluttered with apprehension when she noted just how little of her ravishing body her wispy underthings concealed.

Hal came toward her. His strong fingers curved over the white smooth flesh of her shoulders, twisting her around to face him. She saw his glance waver from her face to the enticing globes of her big breasts. The tissue-thin brassiere didn't even conceal their dainty crests.

"What's the idea?" he demanded tensely. "I've a great mind to turn you over to the police, breaking into my place under false pretenses and attempting to frame me into a blackmail set-up. Get out of here, before I lose my temper completely! You women are all alike, every last one of you—you contemptible little chiseler!"

"Give me a chance to get dressed, can't you?" Mitzi gasped feebly. Now that it was over, she felt small enough to crawl through a keyhole. But she was glad of what she'd done—if only he wouldn't look at her like that.

"You're not going to dress in here," he told her grimly. "Out you go!"

HE PROPELLED HER to the door and flung it open. Mitzi thought he was going to kick her through it. If she hadn't sympathized with him so thoroughly, she would have fought him. And, if she had not been convinced that she had no mind left she would have given him a piece of it—just to relieve her feelings.

Mitzi's hand involuntarily covered the rounded portions of her silken clad hips as she went through the doorway. But she was no sooner in the corridor than he grasped her wrists, pulling her back again.

"There—I've done what any self-respecting man would do!" he breathed jerkily. "I've kicked you out! Now I'm going to do what I've been crazy to do from the first moment you came in here!"

Breath-taking thrills stabbed through Mitzi's body as he swooped her into his arms and carried her to the *chaise longue*. His arm still under her shoulder, he gazed raptly down at her flushed face. She closed her eyes so that he couldn't see what was in them.

"Darling!" he whispered tensely. And then his lips were against hers, seeking, masterful, until it seemed that her own turned to liquid, pouring themselves into his mouth.

His hands smoothed her gorgeous curves, making her shiver with rapture. He kissed her throat and his breath was warm in the deep, crowded cleft of her bosom. With a little sigh of pure rapture Mitzi surged against him, clasping white naked arms around his neck, drawing him down.

"Darling," she breathed, "aren't you curious? I thought you'd hate me—I'm afraid you will, after, unless I tell you why I came!"

He smiled at her tenderly, then kissed her again until she was breathless. Her heart pounded rapturously and her blood was like warm, intoxicating wine.

"I'm not curious," Hal surprised her. "My sister phoned me this afternoon what to expect. She heard my old man tell mother that he was sending his new secretary to my apartment tonight to show me just what a two-timing golddigger Marge is. But I really wasn't in love with Marge. I kept her around because I won't be dictated to.

"When you came I was expecting you. And I recognized you in spite of your grotesque disguise, because I'd seen you once in father's office. Darling, I was in love with you before you ever came. I'm crazy about you now. I'm tired of having my fling, sweet. I don't want to be just a playboy any longer. I want a wife—some one who really loves me—"

With a rapturous sigh Mitzi gave him her lips. And somehow darkness fell over the room —soft, languorous, blissful darkness.

Burnt Fingers

By
Emma Hall

SUSAN FERRY was on her dimpled knee with four pins in her mouth when Gerry Carter came strolling back into the workroom. She looked up at the lean, tall darkness of her employer and felt a vague movement of her blood.

"Who do you think was here?" Gerry's dark eyes were excited. He stood there looking down at Susan as she went on pinning chintz. His eye swept over the small and shining brightness of her, the smooth chestnut hair and the wide hazel eyes.

Susan's blood kept stirring. She didn't really care anything about Gerry Carter. What she felt was purely physical and extraordinarily potent. It had something to do with the way Gerry's black eyes always moved closely over her face and then dropped slowly downward to the jut of her ridiculously enormous breasts. Gerry Carter always made Susan conscious of her femininity and acutely aware of her slim waist and long, tapering legs and the pouting twins that strained out beneath the tight satin of her bodice. He had never touched her and yet, over and over, she had seen the desire to crush her in his arms burning in his eyes; she had seen his fingers twitching at his sides and the powerful breadth of his shoulders rising and falling with the quickness of his breath.

Lately, she had wondered just what she would do if Gerry did take her in his arms. At first she had thought she would slap his face for such impudence. A little later she told herself, "Feeling like this without love is really very tawdry. I don't want any part of it!" But in the last few weeks, because it had been ages since a man's lips had been on her own, she hadn't been so sure that she would slap Gerry's face!

Gerry said, "Say-y, snap out of it and listen to what I'm saying! I said 'Who do you think was here?' "

"From the kneeling worship in your voice I infer that whoever it was it must have been someone quite special. It couldn't have been the King of England, could it?" Her eyes were on his now and she went a little weak inside when she saw his gaze move to the deep V of her blouse. The silk, she knew, closed when she held her breath and gaped revealingly when she spoke.

"No," said Gerry. "It was the Count de la Farfarou. He wants his chateau on the Seine done over!"

"Well, he has come to the right decorators," said Susan, softly. "But why on earth does he want that lovely, lovely old place done over? Don't tell me his Countess wants bath toweling and rick-rack and silly paper-cut-outs on the walls!"

"*He* wants it done over," said Gerry. "She's gone. She left him—about three months ago. I imagine she took most of her things with her."

"You mean—she's gone permanently?"

"I suppose so. She went nuts over a young Spanish musician. At least that's what I heard. I understand they're somewhere together. At Deauville or on the Riviera. But the Count's private life hasn't anything to do with us. The point is, he wants his chateau done over and it sounds like an order for French fabrics and white carpets and Gobelin tapestries. He's filthy with money."

"Filthy with money? And the Countess left him? Say-y that doesn't make sense." Susan's red mouth opened a little. The tip of a small red tongue showed between the even white of her teeth.

"Funny, isn't it? That is, unless you happen to know that the Spanish musician is just as rich as the Count and probably has a few other things thrown into the bargain. Like playing a guitar and mouthing romantic speeches. You've heard about the Spanish, of course. They're heaven's gift to the love starved women of the world!"

"But the Count de la Farfarou isn't any character out of a comic strip, Gerry," said Susan, thoughtfully. "I saw a picture of him once. He looked tall and lean and blonde and immensely handsome. A little on the solemn side, perhaps. But he certainly wasn't repulsive." ,"I wouldn't know, of course," said Gerry, grinning. "Not being a woman. But I still say we aren't interested in the Count's private life. Only in this decorating job. We can make a lot of money out of it if you go about it in the right way. No matter how little you think needs to be done you can suggest a lot."

"You're going to send *me?*"

"Why not?" said Gerry. "The man needs to be dazzled, hypnotized, influenced, intoxicated, lured and otherwise led astray. If you come back with a decorating order for less than ten thousand dollars my confidence in you will be shattered, Susan."

GERRY REACHED OVER and pulled Susan to her feet. That look was in his eyes again. It made Susan's knees tremble and her heart kick against her side. She looked at Gerry, steadily. She didn't love him. She knew that. And yet, she couldn't cope with her emotions nor understand them. Nothing seemed to mat-

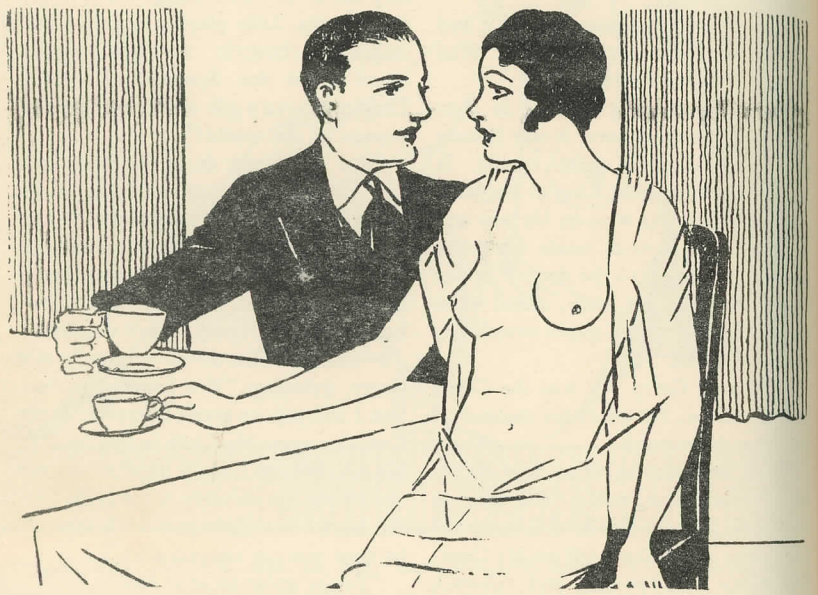
ter except the crazy desire to fling herself against him, to feel his lips on her own and those lean, brown hands caressing her. "Of all the goofy ways to feel," she warned herself. "The best way to lose a job, of course, is to go silly like this over the boss!"

Susan straightened. Paris without a job wasn't the most pleasant thought in the world. She knew all about that. She had worn out too many pairs of shoes on the Rue du Rivoli and the Place de l'Opera and the Champs Elysees looking for work.

Gerry's hands slid over her arms. His face was very close to her own. "Has anyone ever told you how beautiful you are, Susan?" he whispered.

"Not today," said Susan trying to keep her voice casual. "Yesterday, of course, men stopped me on the streets and told me all about my eyes and my—my—my" —she didn't finish. She couldn't

For with a litle groan Gerry had swept her into his arms. He was kissing her wildly, his hands on her soft bare arms, sliding up them, across her back, down the slender line of her waist. The starch of her flowered smock was stiff, almost cool, to his burning palms. His fingers fumbled with the V opening at the neck, he reached for the top of a pearl button, found it already open . . .



"Yes, I'm married. But not for long! Susan, I love you!"

With a gasp Susan pushed back out of his embrace She stood there with her eyes wide, her lips parted and her big breasts taut in front of her. She said, on a strangled sort of note, "Please don't, Gerry. I don't love you. You know that."

Gerry caught her arms again. His eyes were on that open button and it was, Susan knew, a fillip to his feelings. Like waving a red flag before a bull. His voice was low and throbbing when he spoke, "Does it matter, Susan?"

Susan strained away from him again. "Yes, it does." But even as she said the words something warm and breathless kept stirring within her. It swept upward and downward, permeating every inch of her small young body.

"Your lips say one thing—your eyes another, Susan. You didn't know that, did you,"—he caught his breath—"look at me, Susan! Look at me and tell me that you're not moved too. Tell me if you can!"

Susan's eyes raised to his own dark ones. The demure tip of her tongue came out and moistened her warm mouth. She tried to smile as if this didn't matter at all. But her smile faded instantly and her full bosom began to rise and fall rapidly. She thought, 'I don't love him. He doesn't love me. Why do I feel like this? Why? Why? Why?"

There was no answer. She didn't even try to find one. Something had happened. Her soft white arms had gone around his shoulders, her lips were burning against his and her whole young body had flamed against his own, yielding, responsive, reciprocating each pressure. It was madness, of course. She would be sorry afterwards and a little bit ashamed. A girl shouldn't feel like this without love. But it was also a delicious madness. Gerry's fingers were wild with caresses, his blood shot along his body in a flame that seared Susan's soft white flesh. And when he swept her up into his arms, Susan closed her eyes and gave herself up to his love.

TWO HOURS LATER WHEN Susan was driving her ridiculous little French car out of Paris and heading for the Count de la Farfarou's chateau, she tried not to think of Gerry. She told herself, stoutly, "It was just a weak moment and I was a weak fool. If I had been in love with him it would have been different!" But she didn't worry about losing her job with Gerry. During those swift, mad moments Gerry had fallen in love with her. Afterwards, over small, glittering cocktails and cigarettes, Gerry had held her close in his arms, unconsciously caressing her bare shoulder. He had said, his brows darkening a little.

"I've a mind to change my plans about Farfarou, Susan. He has too much money. A fellow like that thinks he can buy the world for cash and everything in it, including any girls he happens to fancy."

"And are you suggesting that he might decide to buy me?" Susan had felt her cheeks burning and her hazel eyes turning into green ice. "This isn't much of a compliment, you know. No matter which way you look at it. Men don't proposition girls unless they have a darned good reason for it—and preliminary encouragement!" She had put her glass down carefully, had pulled out of his arms and had sat there by his side playing with the buttons on her blouse, straightening the seams on her stockings. "Besides," she had finished, getting slowly to her feet, "I've never made a plan and an estimate alone before. I'm thrilled at having the chance when I've been with you less than a year. I'm thrilled and flattered."

"Okay then," Gerry had said, "but watch your step. His wife left him—there was considerable talk."

"Oh, but was it his fault? I thought she had an affair with a Spanish musician."

"I said *okay!* But Pierre de la Farfarou would have to be blind if he couldn't see how pretty you are!" And for a moment Gerry had sat there moving his eyes over the mussed smock, those luscious jutting twins, the slim perfect legs. Susan had heard a queer little sound in his throat, had seen the movement of his fingers toward the am-

he read her mind! How dared he guess what she was thinking!

Pierre went on softly, "Don't fight this, dearest. It's bigger than you or I. It's something that happens once—perhaps twice—in a lifetime. I'm glad it's happened to us." He added, sliding his fingers downward, "It's love. But you know that. Why should I tell you!"

Before Susan knew what was happening to her his arms were about her waist. His hands were on the smooth surface of her back, crushing her against him with such wild force that her breasts were mashed flat against his throbbing chest. He was kissing her with his lips glued on her own, flaming, searing. Electric shocks exploded in her heart. Tongues of flame licked through her veins.

She tried to push Pierre away and to choke back her own dizzy ecstasy. She hated herself for the thrills that burned through her and weakened her resistance. After all, Pierre was married even if he and his Countess were separated. What right had she to allow him to embrace her and devour her mouth with kisses? Because he had talked about love? Hardly. All men talked about love at a time like this!

She finally snatched her mouth from his. She struggled out of his arms. "Let me go!" she cried.

Pierre groped for her, his eyes burning over her. "Why should I? Why?"

"It is wrong. You're married!"

"Yes, I'm married. But not for long Susan, I *love* you!"

"Let me go! Let me go-o-o! Let me g-go!" she cried. "Let me g-go before . . . "

"Never, *ma coeur!* Never!"

And then Susan wrapped her soft arms about his neck, strained against him, her breath coming in little gasps of happy enjoyment beneath his avid kisses. . . .

IT WAS TWO WEEKS before Susan was sufficiently prepared to make an estimate on the remodeling of the chateau! During that time Pierre had occupied all of her waking moments and most of her

sleeping ones. Gerry Carter noticed the difference in her. He sulked a little at first. He couldn't understand it. Susan had been all fire and responsive softness in his arms two weeks ago. Her lips beneath his had been sweet and soft and tremulous. He had thought that during that moment on the sofa in the workroom Susan had fallen as deeply in love with him as he had with her.

But since that moment he had not been able to touch Susan again. She had wriggled out of his grasp every time he had put his fingers on her. She was forever pitching down her skirts and crossing her arms over the jut of her breasts as if to hide any charms that might appeal to him. And there was something almost like terror in her eyes when he stood close to her.

Finally, he began to put two and two together. It must be because of the Count de la Farfarou, he had reasoned. Everything dated back to that day when he had sent her to the chateau. She had come back with flaming cheeks and lips that were smeared with lipstick. She had walked around the shop like someone in a dream. The next day—and the next and the next—it had been the same. Then he had known it was the Count. He had said, very casually, "How is Farfarou these days?"

Susan's eyes had brightened like stars. "Oh, fine," she had said, simply.

"Still married?"

"Oh-h, yes. But not for long. Countess de la Farfarou is at Nice. They're being divorced there. So she can marry her guitar player, I fancy."

SHE HAD SAID IT very indifferently but Gerry had seen her bosom rising and falling, the quick intake of her breath and the flush that spread over her cheeks. He knew then that there was something going on between Susan and Farfarou; that Farfarou had undoubtedly told Susan he was going to marry her when he was free. He had thought, "Farfarou won't, of course. That's just a line. Just a lead on." Aloud he had said, "Watch your step, Susan. Playing with a married man is playing with fire."

Susan was thinking of those very words on a Saturday night as she lay on the sofa in her *pension* room. She had been with Pierre all that day, been in his arms, and trembled at the touch of his fingers, at the ardency of his mouth on hers. A sweet flame had burned through her, quickly, throbbingly. She was thinking now, "Perhaps I am playing with fire. But Pierre isn't really married. And he won't be married at all in a week."

The sudden sharp ring of the doorbell made Susan jerk rigid on the sofa. Her heart began to pound. Pierre—Pierre! But it wasn't Pierre who stood there in the small dark hall as Susan flung open the door. It was a tall, dark, slim woman; a beautiful woman with wide emerald eyes, a seductive red mouth and luscious breasts that quivered a little beneath the dripping splendour of her sables. The woman said softly, "You're Susan Dobbs, aren't you?"

Susan said, "Yes, I am. And you're the Countess de la Farfarou, aren't you?"

The young woman nodded. Then she stepped into the room, closed the door and leaned against it as if for support. "I shan't keep you but a moment," she began, evenly. "I really don't know why I've come. Perhaps I'm a fool. Or altruistic. I don't know. But I had heard about you and Pierre and it worries me. You see, I've come to tell you something that may hurt you now but later you'll thank me for it.

"Susan Dobbs, I'm not divorcing Pierre de la Farfarou. Nor does he want a divorce. We have a strange sort of marriage, Pierre and I. We live our own lives . . . sometimes separately—sometimes together. All depending on the mood we're in and where our interests are at the moment. You see, it all boils down to this. I like being a Countess—Pierre likes being marreid to an Ameri-

can heiress who can indulge him in his extravagant whims. Like having his chateau done over."

The Countess paused a moment and caught her breath— "Do you understand, Susan Dobbs?"

Susan swallowed hard. She thought, "So the money is hers and Pierre never meant to divorce her." It was a hard dose to take but Susan downed it in one prodigious gulp. Aloud she said, "I understand, Countess."

The Countess said, "Pierre was probably only an infatuation, Susan. There would be nothing very strange about that. He infatuates every woman he meets— even me at times." She laid a soft gloved hand on Susan's bare shoulder — "Isn't there some other young man whom you really love? Who can set you straight?"

Susan didn't answer. She just shrugged her shoulders. Then the Countess was gone and Susan was standing there biting her lips and holding her furiously pounding heart with trembling fingers. She thought, "Don't let this get you! Don't even think about it!"

She turned swiftly then and ran across the room to her closet, her big breasts bobbing up and down under the lace brassiere as her feathered mules clicked across the floor. She flung out a dress, a pair of slippers, a coat and hat. Gerry would be at the shop, she knew. He always worked late on Saturday nights. "Maybe Pierre was just an infatuation," Susan said in her mind.

And then flying out of the door and down the dark steps, Susan said, "Well, I shall soon find out!"

SUSAN LET HERSELF into the decorating shop with the key Gerry had given her. She went quickly through the dark back hall toward the workroom. She came up to the partly opened door, put her slim hand against it and then stopped short, her eyes wide and her breasts taut in front of her. The couple on the sofa, sitting before the flickering blaze of a dying fire, did not see or hear her. Gerry and the Countess were talking.

The Countess was saying, "Well, Gerry, it worked. The girl is yours. I could tell by her eyes that she believed every word I said. As for me, I'm very glad you sent me that wire asking me to come to Paris. Pierre is divorcing me, you know. He settled an amount on me that looks like a tip you'd give a hat-check girl. I didn't have one speck of evidence against him and he had the dead wood on me! But this changes matters a little. I'll go to see him tomorrow and tell him what I know about his little decorator. He'll be so eager for nothing to interfere with his freedom he'll probably give me a great deal of money and all will be well! I wouldn't stand a ghost of a chance in court of getting *anything!*"

The Countess sighed a little and flung her dark head against the back of the sofa. "Golly, do I need money!" she said. "I'm in debt up to my ears!"

Susan pressed her nose against the door and squinted one eye inside. She saw Gerry's hand go to the Countess' knee and stay there! She saw his dark head move over a little and felt, more than saw, his eyes on the deep V of the Countess bodice.

The Countess lifted her eyes to Gerry's. Her eyes were shining and her mouth was open, "You love Susan Dobbs, don't you? Enough to plot and plan to get her?"

Gerry said, "Yes. But I'm human. You're a very beautiful woman, Myra Farfarou. I hadn't counted on that when I sent you that telegram!"

Myra leaned back on the sofa. It was a sensuous pose. Her full bosom rose out in front of her, soft and round with a shadowy valley dividing it. Her legs shot out gracefully in front of her, the satin of her dress slithering up around her thighs, the black lace edging of her panties showing. "Could you forget Susan for a little while?" she whispered, her lips staying parted and her lashes fluttering.

"For a little while," said Gerry.

Susan pushed open the door. She stood there like a mischievous elf, her blue eyes dancing. "*Aw*, go on and forget me!" she laughed. And then she turned on her heel and ran down the hall. Behind her she could hear Gerry calling her name; could hear his wild footsteps following her down the hall.

But when he reached the side door she was already in her car and swerving out of the alley. She didn't even glance back at him. She was looking at the clock on the dash and the quivering arrow of the speedometer. She was thinking, "If I drive like a bat out of hell I'll reach Pierre before midnight! *Oh, Pierre — Pierre!*"

And she pressed the gas pedal to the floor.

Desiree Dreams

"Yes Ronnie, I do love you" she said. I'll always love you."

By Dave Mann

DESIREE lay curled up closely in Ronnie's arms, her red hair licking over his white shirt like flames and her green eyes wide in the dark. She lay there very still and quite, no longer hungrily straining to the tall, broad blondness that was Ronnie. She was listening to Ronnie's even breathing, to the calm *thump-thump* of his heart under her soft cheek.

She was thinking, "I have a future here in New York. I'm just beginning to go places. I want my name in neon lights, in the papers. I want to see my face smiling from rotogravures and from bill-boards all over the country. If I marry Ronnie and go to Paris with him all the work I've put in at the King Cole Club will be wasted. All the crazy things I've done to get publicity will be for nothing. Ronnie could wait for me, couldn't he? I don't know. Could he? *Would* he?"

Out of her window Desiree could see the tall dark shadow of Grant's Tomb against the sky. Would it be enough to lie like this in Ronnie's arms and see the Eiffel Tower against the Paris sky? What was it like in Paris anyway? Gay all year round, people said. But would it be gay for her? Wouldn't she be just another newspaper man's wife, waiting in a second rate *pension* in second rate clothes and doing second rate things?

Desiree felt something like panic creeping through her blood. "Ronnie!" she cried out. She jerked out of his embrace, squared him around with her scarlet-tipped fingers biting down into his shoulders.

Ronnie blinked his blue eyes sleepily, yawned a little. He said, "What on earth, Butch. Got a pain?"

She said, quickly, her green eyes shining and her full young bosom straining out under the cobwebby lace of her brassiere, "Ronnie, I can't decide a thing like marrying you, giving up my career and going to Paris right away. It's much too important. I've got to have time to think."

Ronnie blinked again. "But you—you've *got* to decide, Butch. I'm sailing in forty-eight hours. Surely that's time enough in which to decide. I mean . . ." —his eyes became anxious as they searched hers. "Look here, Butch, it isn't because you don't really love me, is it? I mean, it isn't because you aren't quite sure?"

DESIREE'S SMALL MOUTH trembled a little. For a moment she didn't speak. Her green eyes moved slowly over his face, taking in the lean cheeks, the burning blue eyes and the tousled yellow hair. She thought once more, What would it be like without Ronnie—without his lips on mine each evening and his fingers caressing me? She switched the thought off abruptly.

"Yes, Ronnie, I do love you," she said. "I'll always love you—nothing can change that— ever. It's just that for four years I've given every single minute of my life when I wasn't with you to getting somewhere. Dancing at men's banquets first and one night club after the other until the King Cole scout found me and gave me a swell spot. And now Reggie Drake, who owns that international chain of department stores, comes every night. You know how he builds musicals around a girl who takes his fancy. Makes them almost over night. I can't let this chance slide through my fingers."

"And you're willing to pay the price?" asked Ronnie, sourly.

"Please don't think *that*, Ronnie!" Desiree cried swiftly. "Oh, I'd have to flatter him, I know. Lead him on. Maybe make him think that something would come his way later. But I'd see that he kept his hands in his own pudgy little lap or busy smoothing down those three split hairs over his bald dome. I know how to take care of myself, Ronnie."

Some of the tenseness left his face then. He even managed to smile. "Silly little oaf," he said, "I wonder if you really believe that. Reggie Drake isn't the type to sit back and toss a hundred grand into a show just for the privilege of holding his hands in his own pudgy lap or caressing his own billiard ball."

And then he went tense again, his blue eyes bleak. "You know just what would happen if you lead Reggie on, don't you? Well, if you don't know, I'll tell you. . . ."

THEY SAT THERE then for another hour, arguing, pleading, cajoling. It ended when Desiree cried out helplessly, "I can't give up this chance, Ronnie. I *can't!*"

Ronnie's face drained of color. She could see his paleness, even in the dimness of the shaded lights. "All right, Butch," he said coldly. "It's your life. You've got to live it the way you think best. It's all right. It has to be all right. But Butch, if you loved me—you'd come with me. Oh, Butch—I—I need you so."

He was standing above her now, tall and blond and terribly handsome. For a long moment Desiree looked at him, wanting him forever. Wanting his arms about her slim body, her bosom softly rising and falling against his muscular chest and her lips warm and soft upon his. "Love isn't fair," she thought, furiously. "It gets in the way."

Ronnie was waiting, she knew, for her to suddenly change her mind; to say that she would sail with him. She could feel his eyes moving over her, lingering on that cobwebby lace, moving on down to her silken legs. She trembled inside wildly, hungrily. In another minute, she knew, she would be up off of this sofa and throwing herself against Ronnie. Promising things, anything . . . just so he would kiss her again and run his hands in that tantalizingly quick way across the satiny flesh of her back. And if she promised, she'd live with it. She was like that.

So she sat very still, her hands clenched into fists at her sides, her teeth ground together.

Ronnie was done with waiting now. He said, defeated, "Okay. But if you change your mind by four a.m. Saturday, there will be plenty of time to get an extra ticket. The *Normandie* sails at six."

Desiree said, "I won't change my mind, Ronnie. I know what I want."

"All right," said Ronnie. "This is the end. I won't try to see you again."

He was slipping into his coat now. Desiree, sitting there alternately warm and cold, could see his shadow on the floor. Saw it move slowly, almost hesitantly to the door; saw a bright spear of light from the hallway as he opened the door—and then darkness. Ronnie was gone. Gone.

Desiree threw herself down on the sofa and lay there rigidly, her large feminine hillocks mashed flat under her. Her mind was trailing Ronnie down to the elevator, through the corridors, out into the street. There's still time to call him back, her thoughts kept surging into her brain. There's still time. She hung on to herself, desperately. "This is just physical," she told herself with a laugh. "I'll get over Ronnie. I'll be glad I let him go. Love really isn't important. And a career *is!*"

AT TEN O'CLOCK Desiree swept through the door and the room burst into wild applause followed by a dead attentive silence. She sang *"Martha"*—a slender, nearly fragile red headed girl, under a spotlight that brought out the fire in her hair, the emerald brightness of her eyes and threw shadows beneath her jutting breasts to make them almost grotesquely big under the moulded sequin bodice. When she finished, she smiled. Radiantly. She smiled at them all and, turning her head a little, smiled into Reggie Drake's eyes. He was sitting on the end of his chair now, his lips puffed out with his quick breath and his pale eyes amazingly bright through their tired film. His palms were beating one upon the other to add to the deafening roar of applause.

Desiree waited for the din of approval to finish. She waited with her green eyes warm on Reggie's face. She was luring him, attracting him, egging him on, thinking all the while, "He can put my name in neon lights. He can make me famous." Then the orchestra struck up again and Desiree's nimble fingers caught a jeweled zipper, the sequin dress sailed through the air into the arms of a waiting page.

She sang now with passion, with amour; and when she ceased singing she went into a dance routine, those large breasts jiggling up and down beneath a ribbon of silver, those slim hips weaving in and out. The spotlight raced to trail her across the floor and Reggie's bald head stood out white and shiny in the nimbus of the light. She was dancing for Reggie tonight, staying close to him, luring him with her nimble legs, her tapping toes, the bounce and swing of her majestic bosom.

REGGIE DRAKE, WHO had held many women in his arms, who had kissed some of the most beautiful women in the world, was sitting there breathing hard, his eyes hot in his head and his hands trembling. He watched Desiree sing and dance again and again as the evening wore on. He watched with an expression he was not particularly aware of, but which, after years of Manhattan life, had become a little saturnine, a spot drooling.

And when Desiree's last number was done, Reggie got up and went slowly across the dance floor and out through the dressing room door. He knew his way along this corridor. Desiree wasn't the first King Cole girl who had led him down that dark walk. But she was the first who had made his legs feel weak beneath him, his heart so hotly throbbing. Lately, he had worried about his reactions to women. He had flitted from one glamour girl to another in search for that old hot rush of blood through him. But it had not come. At best, he had felt only a quickening of his pulse, a pleasant mild warmth through his veins.

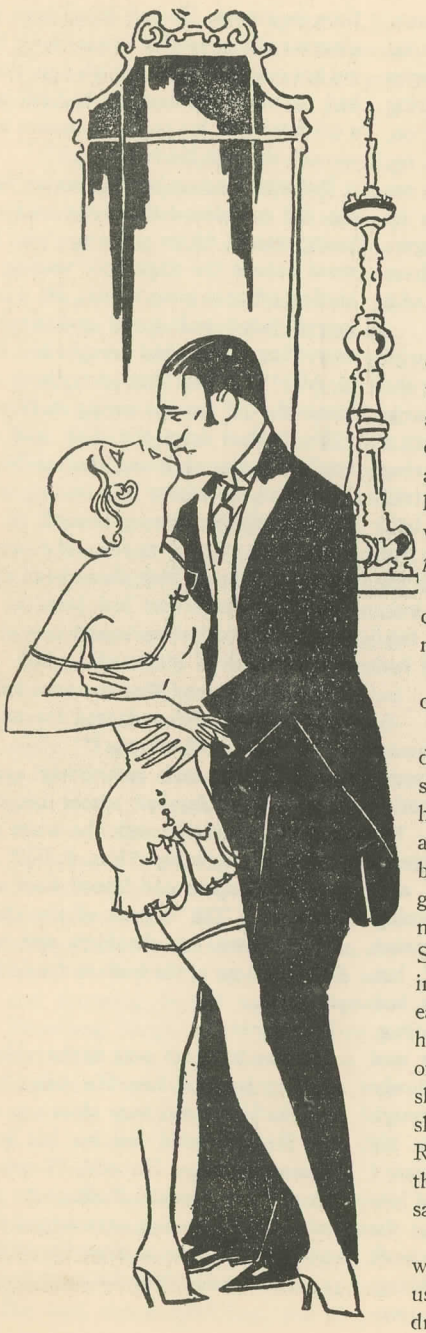
But now Desiree had his senses flaming. He was almost that same expectant young man of fifteen years ago who had stood outside the stage door waiting for his first affair to come to him. He was no longer jaded and bored and tired of everything. Desire had brought him back to life. "I'll give her everything she wants if . . ." he was saying to himself.

He pushed open the door with the small gold star on it and Desiree, standing before the mirror in a trailing white chiffon negligee, swung around on her fluffy litle white mules. She smiled brightly—a smile that showed not at all the bitter lump that had leapt in her throat and the sudden repugnance at the very thought of his touching her.

He came in and shut the door behind him. He said, "You danced for me tonight, Desiree, didn't you?"

She leaned back seductively against the vanity table, her bosom becoming more prominent beneath the white chiffon. She said, softly, "Yes. I did." And she smiled again and leaned back a little farther. The V neck of the chiffon slipped down her shoulders and white flesh came out of the froth to dazzle those pale eyes.

REGGIE HURRIED OVER to the table and stood in front of her. He didn't touch her. He just stood very close—so close that Desiree could feel his hot breath fanning her face. He said, "I want to talk with you tonight. Perhaps we could accomplish something over supper at my apartment. I have a show in mind for you. I've been looking for some one who



could dance and sing like you. Interested?"

Desiree said simply, "Yes. I'll be ready in a moment." And she went behind a screen. She slipped out of the negligee and ran trembling fingers over her satiny skin. She was thinking, "If I'm smart I can hold him in place. I know what he wants—and what I want. It's just a matter now of who can outsmart who!"

Suddenly Desiree's green eyes widened and her mouth flew open. Between the crack in the fold of the screen she saw one eye—one pale, watery eye, glistening brightly. With a little screech of annoyance, she yanked down her negligee and held it up before her. She said, with a sort of gasp, "Mr. Drake—*please!*"

"You were so quiet back there," his confused voice came to her. "I thought maybe you had fainted."

"Oh, yeah?" thought Desiree, furiously. But she let it go at that.

During the next few moments she dressed quickly, straining a wisp of pink satin across her bosom, pale flesh colored hose up her slim legs, pink satin panties about her hips. When she stepped from behind the screen she was wearing a pink gown of sequins that glittered from beneath a long flowing black velvet cape. She walked slowly toward Reggie, feeling her bosom moving up and down with each step, feeling the sensuous grace of her swinging hips and the proud flame of her hair; knowing happy, how when she wished she could attract a man. She slipped her fingers casually through Reggie's arm, felt a tremor shoot through him at her touch. Smiling she said, "I'm ready, Mr. Drake."

REGGIE'S RIVERSIDE DRIVE apartment was lush and rich and magnificent. He ushered Desiree into the long dimly lit drawing room, took her velvet wrap, his fingers lingering a little too long on her bare shoulders. She pulled away as if she hadn't noticed and swept across the thick black carpet. With a little sigh she dropped down upon a low sofa near the window, lit a cigarette and sat there drawing on it, looking at Reggie through the thin spiral of smoke, her eyes slightly narrowed.

She was a little frightened until she got to thinking about all that Reggie Drake could do for her. She was seeing her name in neon lights, her pictures in the papers, rave notices. When he slid down on the sofa by her side, very close, and laid his cheek against her bare shoulder, Desiree went stiff and cold. She thought, "I can't possibly!" But she would, she knew. She wanted a career more than anything—

She hardly knew when Reggie Drake took her cocktail glass out of her hand and laid his hand on her small silken knee. She became conscious of it only when she felt his breath against her ear, heard his voice saying things that under any other circumstances she would have resented bitterly. She thought again, I can't. But in the same moment her arms went slowly about his shoulders, her lips turned up to his kiss. She would, she had decided calmly, string him along with a few kisses, sparsely given—words that held promise and yet—*meant nothing!*

HIS MOUTH CLOSED down on hers and Desiree went sick inside. She wished frantically that she was the type who could do this sort of thing casually, uncaringly — even enthusiastically. She screwed her eyes together in a dark tangle and let his lips stay on her own. She tried to go limply responsive as his hands pudgy and clammy caressed the satiny flesh of her shoulders and arms. And then she heard Reggie groan hoarsely, felt his breath hot and quick in her mouth, felt his hands sweeping wildly up her arms, down them, across her bare back. Felt herself mashed flat against his hard chest.

The telephone rang shrilly, demandingly, and Reggie with a grunt like a pig drew back. He burst out, angrily, "What the hell! And this time of the night!" He stalked to the foyer, snatched up the telephone. And Desiree, sinking down into the sofa pillows, shut her eyes and clenched her fists together. "Saved," she said, ironically, "by the bell!"

Reggie was talking excitedly to some one. She didn't know who. She didn't give a damn. Nothing mattered but that the telephone had rung and that from this moment on she would out-smart Reggie somehow. She wouldn't let him touch her again. Her flesh still crawled where the nasty fish-like slimy fingers had moved over her.

Reggie slammed up the receiver with a curse. He came stalking back, his pale eyes angry. "A fire at my main store," he announced. "I'll have to go, of course. Damn the luck. I'll be back as soon as I can, darling. I want to talk to you about your new show— and us. Curl up here on the sofa—and dream of me. Don't let this fire spoil our seance. . . ."

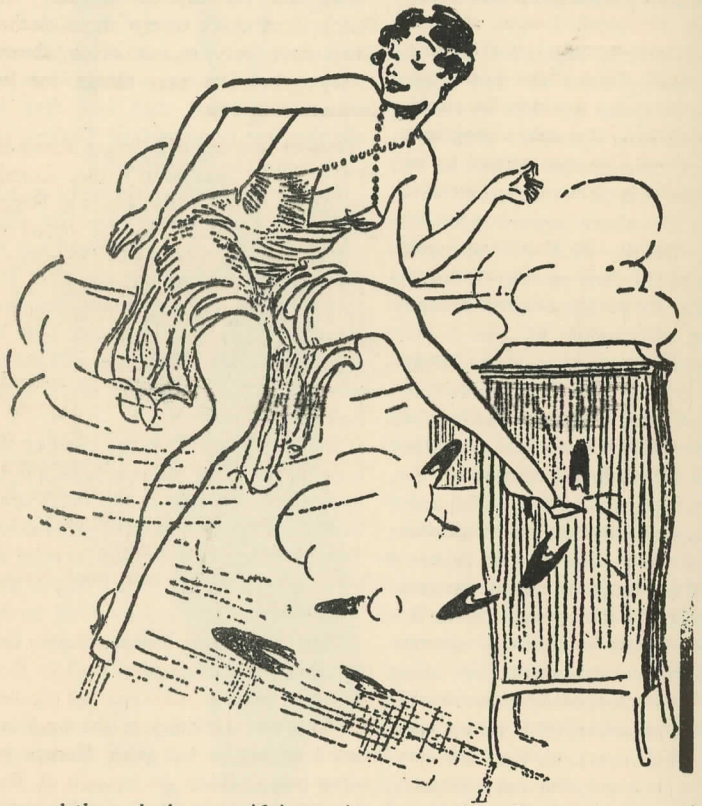
AND WITH A quick scorching kiss on her lips, Reggie was gone, slamming the door behind him.

"Whew!" said Desiree. She got up from the sofa and went out weakly to the balcony that over-looked the roof-tops of tenements a few stories below. She stood there leaning against the balustrade, feeling the cool air in her face. She would wait for Reggie, of course. Her career was everything—and Reggie was her career now. She smoked a cigarette nervously, her hands trembling on the white cylinder. And then she saw a pair

of binoculars on a metal table. Reggie probably used them to show his guests the superb view of the Hudson and the Palisades. She picked them up indifferently and put them to her eyes.

She never knew quite why she focused them on the tenement roof below. But they were kissing each other with their hearts upon their lips and with strong warm love in their every caress. They were in love, those two, as she loved Ronnie and as he loved her.

Watching them Desiree's heart began to race, her blood flamed out through



Desiree raced through the magnificent suite—scooped her black velvet cape in her arms, and hurried through the corridor to the elevator.

she did. And then she was standing with her red mouth open and her eyes wide beneath the lenses. Down on that roof below, she could see in perfect detail a shabbily dressed young man and a more shabbily dresed young woman. They were in each other's arms with the sweet abandon that she had been in Ronnie's her veins. In just a few hours Ronnie would be gone and love, like that, would be gone with him. There would be no more kisses that made her gasp for her breath; no more caresses that burned like fire over her eager soft flesh; no more moments with Ronnie calling her Butch and whispering things into her

ars that made little spasms of delight rack the very pith of her body. Ronnie ould be gone and she would have her areer . . . and Reggie. Reggie who made er flesh creep and her heart feel like a mp of ice beneath one jutting breast.

WITH A SORT OF cry Desiree raced rough the magnificent suite, scooped er black velvet cape in her arms and rried through the corridor to the eletor. And then she was out in the street, aving frantically for a cab, saying in a oice that shook that she wanted to be ken as swiftly as possible to Pier No. 8.

Ronnie was in the stateroom lying relessly across the bunk. A very handome young Ronnie in gay striped pamas, his blond hair tousled. He leaped p on his elbow when Desiree came rough the door. He said, grinning at er, "Hi-there, Butch! I thought you'd ome." Then he swung his long legs over he edge of the bunk, sat up, held out his rms.

Desiree, with her heart thumping razily, felt those arms fold about her; elt her body aching with rapture beneath he power of his quick, eager embrace. Her lips throbbed beneath his, sweetly ainful, completely responsive.

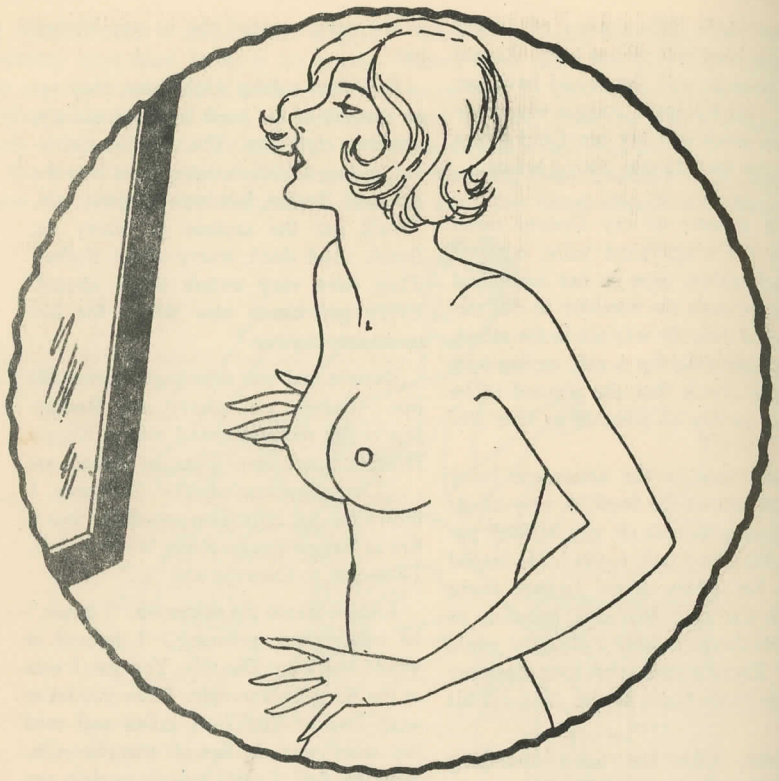
She said into his lips breathlessly. "I ould have been a fool not to have come, Ronnie. I don't want anything but you -and love. I found that out tonight." nd then she said no more because Ronie was drawing her closer and closer to im, and he was kissing her violently, avagely, as she wanted to be kissed . . . as she never wanted him to stop kissing her.

And then a long while later, they sat on the side of the bunk together, quietly, smoking cigarettes. The ship was moving, rolling a little—plowing out into the Atlantic. Ronnie, his brows drawn, said, "We'll get the captain to marry us, Butch. And don't worry about clothes. They have very swank shops aboard. Every gal wants new things for her trousseau anyway."

Desiree laid one slim finger across his lips. "Before you marry me, Ronnie, you've got to know that I was at Reggie Drake's apartment. That he kissed me . . ." her voice trailed off— "Anyway. I didn't fall for him. You see, there was a fire at Reggie's main store. When he left, I—— got to thinking and . . ."

Ronnie kissed the finger tip. "I know," he interrupted, grinning. "I figured it would work out like this. You see. I was at the King Cole tonight. I saw you leave with Drake. And I—I called and said his store was on fire. I thought—Oh, what the hell, I can't exactly explain my hunch. It was just a long shot. But—it was right!"

"And how!" said Desiree, deadly serious. And then she smiled up into Ronnie's blue eyes, crushed out her cigarette on the silver tray beside the bunk and curled herself in his arms. Ronnie was a guy you couldn't get enough of. Ronnie was her man—and she'd come so near thinking that a career was more important than—this! Golly, what a fool she had almost been!



Cocktail Party

By Lucille Adams

IT REALLY wasn't a party that the Burtons were given in their cozy little suburban bungalow, in the accepted sense of the term, because it hadn't been preceded by formal invitations.

However, from the standpoint of gaiety, laughter, spontaneous freedom and high jinks, it *was* a party! . . . And, like most impromptu affairs, it speedily developed a flavor that prearranged socials are apt to lack!

After dinner that Saturday night, Letty Burton had suggested the movies to her newly-wed husband, Bob. While the tickets were being purchased, who should come strolling up to the box office but Sidney Hollaway and his wife, Nan!

Naturally, they sat together, as is customary with good friends.

At the end of the performance, Letty whispered:

"Come over to the house for a cocktail!"

"I never refuse!" smiled Nan.

"That's a great idea!' commented Sidney.

The lobby was crowded with chattering couples, but above the din they heard a shrill voice calling: "Yoo-hoo!"

"It's Marie and Jack!" said Letty, waving a hand. . . . The Porters had happened to select the same movie that night.

"Hello!" they cried, when they met up on the sidewalk.

Letty linked an arm with Marie, and murmured in her ear: "We were going to have a cocktail. . . . Want to join us?"

"Thanks!"

Jack had overheard the stage whisper, and chimed in: "You don't have to ask me, Letty. . . . My throat's parched!"

Their cars were parked in adjacent spots, and very soon three pairs of headlights were gleaming along the road which led straight to the Burton bungalow!

ONE GOOD COCKTAIL quickly led to another . . . then a third . . . and a forth! By that time the unexpected party was on in full swing, the radio was furnishing dance music from a New York night club in a succession of fox-trots which demanded shuffling feet, and sex consciousness was beginning to be apparent!

Busily engaged in mixing another pitcher, Bob Burton searched for more oranges and found none. Marie, "helping" him, laughed.

"Letty!" he roared.

"What's the matter?" she asked, hovering in the doorway, with Sidney at her heels.

"Oranges, darling, and plenty of them!"

Her face clouded for a moment, anxiously. "Aren't there any there?" She pointed to a cupboard.

"I used those!" retorted Bob.

"Then you've finished them!" she said. "Darn it! And there isn't a store open at this hour."

"Why worry?" Marie cut in. "I've got two dozen at home . . . Jack can drive over and get them in a jiffy." Going to the door, she sung out: "Jack! Come here, will you?"

He sidled in, Nan holding on to his arm. "What's up?"

"We've run out of oranges!" explained Marie. "Hop over to the house, like a good boy, and bring those I bought this afternoon."

"Okay!" said Jack, amiably. "But I won't go alone!"

"Come on, I'll go with you!" Nan burst out. "I need the air, anyway."

Sidney turned to Bob. "How are the bottles? Got enough?"

"I guess so!"

"This impromptu party is so good that I'd like to contribute something!" Sidney went on. "While Jack is getting the oranges, I'll hop in the car and raid my cellar! . . . But who's going with me?"

"Keep him company, Letty!" suggested Bob.

The whirr of a motor on the driveway signalized the fact that Jack was already on his way with Nan. . . . And the crunching of heels on the gravel told of Sidney's departure with Letty!

LEFT ALONE with Bob, Marie glanced at the cocktail pitcher.

"We can have a teeny one, can't we?" she murmured, affecting a childish lisp. That was a sign that she was beginning to feel vampish! A brunette was Marie, decidedly so! Her hair was black and straight and shiny, drawn back tightly from her smooth white forehead and coiled in a neat mass low down on her neck.

"You pour it," said Bob, "while I get a cigarette." The box was in the living

room. When he came back, Marie purred:

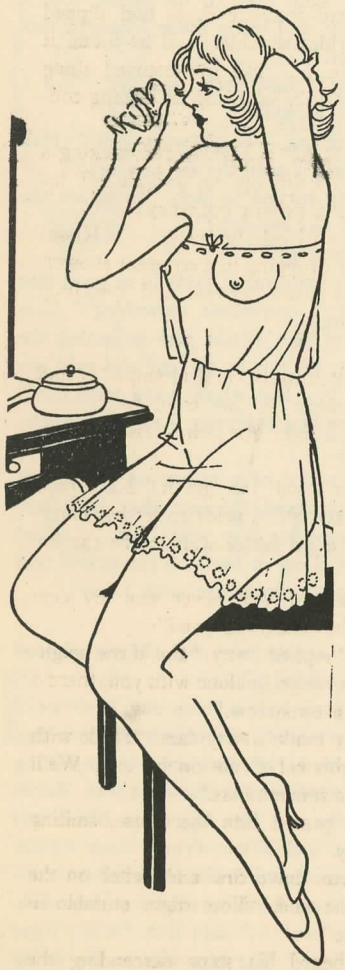
"Didin't you bring me one?"

Bob was puffing contentedly, but between the fingers of his other hand there was another lighted cigarette.

"Here it is!" he said.

"Ah! I didn't think you'd forget me!"

She lifted her face so that he could insert the cigarette between her lips, prettily parted and vividly crimson. . . . Hers was a mouth that hinted of kisses, moist passionate, intense!



Her dress had slipped off.

"Your cocktail, sir!" she smiled, handing him a glass.

"I've been wanting to propose a toast to those black eyes of yours!" he remarked. "They're the darkest I've ever seen!"

"Do you like them?" She opened her eyelids wider and wider.

"Attractive, I'll say!" He took two sips before he added: "I would never tire of looking into their depts."

Marie laughed merrily. "This is so sudden, Bob Burton! And how long have you felt that way?"

"How long have I known you?" he grinned. "That's the answer!"

"Honest?"

"Truly!"

"Then let's have another cocktail!" She held out the empty glass and Bob refilled it. The pitcher was almost exhausted, and he remarked:

"I hope they hurry back with those oranges!"

"They needn't rush!" Marie said in an undertone. "There's enough left for *you* and *me* . . . Besides, I want to hear some more about my eyes!"

"It would take a poet to describe them!" declared Bob.

"Oh, aren't you a fibber!" She rolled those black orbs in a heart disturbing arc, then whispered: "Is there anything else that attracts?"

"How do you get your hair to glisten?"

"It's a secret! . . . You must ask my hairdresser that question! She knows and I don't."

"Your skin looks as smooth as white marble," Bob continued. "Is that a beauty secret, too?"

Marie ran her fingers lightly over her arms. Bob stepped nearer, depositing his glass on the table.

"Is it the kind one loves to touch?" he asked.

"Uh-huh!"

"I see a dimple."

"Where?"

"Just above your elbow . . . here!" Bob put a finger on the spot. Marie laughed. His hand stroked the fleshy upper arm caressingly, back and forth.

"You're sweet! he murmured.

Marie didn't move. Emboldened by her quiet acceptance of the first caress, he slid an arm around her waist and found it yielding delightfully to the slight pressure he exerted. Simultaneously, he discovered twin breasts that made his fingertips tingle.

'Oh Bob Burton!" she cooed. "Behave yourself!"

"You've got a wonderful figure, Marie!"

"Have I?'

His glance flitted from her eyes to her lips, breaking apart in a teasing smile.

"Pretty mouth, too!" he muttered hoarsely. "Would it be out of the question if I suggested a kiss?"

Marie's laugh was as enticing as her smile. "That's what they tell me my mouth *always* suggests . . . a kiss!"

Bob bent his head and gently laid his lips on hers. . . . It was a placid kiss at first, tentatively feeling its way, but suddenly her mouth twitched and clung . . . He experienced the sort of thrill that would come if his lips had been in contack with a live electric wire!

At last she broke the connection, gasping:

"Ahhhhhh! Let me . . . catch . . . my breath!"

Snugly imprisoned by the masterful arm around her waist, she felt his hand wandering all over her in nervous restiveness. Then he slumped down on the pantry chair, pulling her on to his lap.

"Bob!" she cried. "I'm surprised!"

"Give me another kiss!" he demanded.

"No!" She shook her head from side to side.

"Why?" he pleaded, caressing her avidly.

"Because. . ." Marie's voice trembled with emotion. "Because one more kiss like that wouldnt be fun . . . it'd be serious!"

Her semi-decollete dress had slipped off one white shoulder, and he found it irresistable. . . . His lips coursed along the warm skin, following its sloping contour to her neck.

"Stop, Bob!" she whispered, making a half-hearted attempt to wriggle off his lap. "You're driving me crazy!"

But he only held her closer. . . . Kisses were now dropping in a constant shower. . . . Marie closed her eyes and went limp in his arms!

SIDNEY MADE several attempts to find the keyhole in his own front door.

"Shall I light a match?" asked Letty, laughing.

"Never mind, I've got it!' He turned the key and stood aside to let her enter.

"Maybe I'd better wait in the car for you!"

"Nonsense! You never saw my new bar in the cellar, did you?"

"No!" replied Letty. "But if the neighbors saw me go in alone with you, there'd be gossip tomorrow."

Sidney made a wry face. "Heck with the neighbors! Come on in. . . . We'll only be a few minutes."

Letty passed into the house, smiling excitedly.

"I'll run down first and switch on the light," he said. "You might stumble in the dark."

She heard his steps descending the stairs to the cellar, then a flood of light

illuminated the interior, which was the signal for her to follow.

Sidney had installed an old-fashioned bar, and behind it there was a bewildering array of bottles of all descriptions.

"Some of them are empty!" he said, grinning. "They're there for atmosphere."

"It's cute!" cried Letty.

"Thanks! . . . Now, what'll you have, lady fair?" He wiped off the top of the bar and threw the towel over his arm.

"You'd make a fine bartender!"

"None better!" he boasted. "Scotch, rye, cognac, a cocktail, or a sip of this liqueur?"

"We shouldn't stay too long," she reminded him. "They'll be waiting for us over the house."

"Spoken like an excellent hostess!" he replied. "But let's stay a *little* while. . . . It's not often that I get an opportunity to entertain a beautiful blonde all alone at my bar!"

"It's thrilling for me, too!" she murmured. Her blue eyes were dancing with excitement, and her pink cheeks were flushed.

"Don't you have any seats for your guests?" she asked, looking around.

"Sit on the bar! It's fun."

Striding to her side, he gripped her slender waist with both hands and hoisted her up. . . . As he did so, he wished that she would hop down again, so that he could repeat the operation. . . . He liked the way her resilient waistline responded to his clasp!

The honey color of her hair, arranged with studied carefree curliness, formed a prefect frame for the prettiness of her small features. . . . An entrancing little nose tilted at a very saucy angle, thinly penciled eyebrows, tiny mouth with softly puckering scarlet lips, and a round, dimpled chin.

"If you won't choose for yourself, I'll make a choice for you," Sidney decided. "I think you'll like the liqueur." So saying, he filled two glasses with a combination of three different hues.

"M-m-m-m-m! It's delicious!" she said, tasting daintily.

Letty's frock was cut out rather daringly in the back, and even though the front was modestly high, the chiffon sweetly outlined the adolescent delicacy of the breasts that suspended their sharp-pointed loveliness with such an innocent air.

Sidney's eyes took in everything about her with an appreciation that was keen and rapidly growing keener! . . . Her slim legs, swinging clear of the bar, caused her skirt to retreat above a delectable pair of knees.

The liqueur was fiery. . . . Mixed with the potency of the cocktails that they had imbibed earlier, it stirred their blood and made their pulses beat with the rapidity of a trip-hammer.

"You're the best-looking girl who ever sat on this bar!" he told her. "I'd like to take a picture."

"Some other time!" she said, jumping down. "We'd better run along now . . . you know there are guests at *my* house."

As her feet touched the floor, she staggered and rocked against him. . . . "Oh, Sidney!" she exclaimed, putting her hand to her eyes. "I'm really dizzy!"

Any gentleman would have placed a protecting arm around her! Sidney placed *both* arms, and she fitted into the circular embrace in soft relaxation.

Her head drooped naturally on his shoulder. . . . Her rosebud lips were only an inch away. . . . He couldn't resist their temptation, and found them as cloying as the honey that her hair resembled.

Her eyelids fluttered open, as startled as a bird.

"Sidney!" she scolded. "That was naughty.

"Very few redheads were born redheaded."

"I'm sorry!" he apologized.

"You're forgiven this time," she smiled. "But we ought to be going back. . . . They'll think we're lost!"

Up the stairs she tripped. . . . Sidney waited until she reached the top, then he pulled the light switch.

In the darkness, he ascended with heavy footfalls, and when he got to the landing above, he groped for the switch there, but instead of finding it, he found Letty. . . . What he judged to be a swelling and hard-tipped breast was the first thing he touched!

He swept her into his arms.

"Don't, Sidney. . . . You mustn't."

"Just a little kiss!" he implored, straining her to him.

He heard her breathing rapidly as he searched for her mouth in the dimness of the hallway. . . . Sidney couldn't remember when he had kissed such tremulous lips, if ever! . . . Again and again he found them, parting them with his own, drinking in the dewy fragrance!

She struggled uncertainly in his arms, then crumpled as she realized that she was responding fervently to every kiss.

"Sidney!" she whispered. "You're . . . awful. . . ."

"What?" he queried. If she repeated the accusation, he had every intention of releasing her. . . . Sidney wasn't one to take what was not gladly offered.

"I mean. . . ." she hesitated, "I mean . . . you're awfully . . . nice!" The last word was the merest whisper, trailing off to nothingness in the ecstacy of her kiss!

There was a small couch in the hallway. Two bottles that he had selected to carry back to the Burtons' were tossed upon it, and he followed suit, with Letty!

"They'll be waiting!" she panted. . . .

As she spoke, her sugar-sweet little tongue trembled once more against his mouth.

"Let them wait!" said Sidney, faintly.

"TWO DOZEN ORANGES needing a bag!" chanted Jack, hunting in drawer and closet.

"Maybe we can make a package," suggested Nan.

"A bag is better . . . here's one!" It happened to be laying by the side of a tall bottle of good old pre-war Scotch that Jack was in the habit of nicking only on *very* special occasions.

"Look, Nan!"

"Tasting is better than looking!" she said, laughing.

"That's right!" Jack produced the bottle and a couple of glasses.

"Here's to that gorgeous red hair of yours!" he murmured.

"Since when did *you* fancy red hair?" she smiled.

"It always interests me," he replied, opening a bottle of mineral water. "They say that it indicates *that sort* of a disposition."

Nan's greyish-blue eyes narrowed as she drank her highball. "Maybe that's true when it's *naturally* red."

"And yours?" Jack pursued.

"I was born with it . . . so there!"

Her thin-lipped mouth curled disdainfully at the corners. . . . It was like a rust-colored gash beneath her sensitive nostrils. . . . The kind of mouth that could utter a stinging rebuke or whisper phrases of endearment with equal intensity, and whose kiss could be as cool or as hot as the subject invoked!

"Very few redheads were born redheaded!" Jack commented.

"That's true, darling boy. . . . But I was!"

Draining her glass, her eyes gleamed with deviltry: "And with one more highball, I'll be fully prepared to prove it beyond a shadow of a doubt!"

"Not that I doubt you, Nan!" Jack countered. "But . . ." He poured a generous quantity of Scotch into her glass,

A gown of black velvet moulded Nan's figure.

added ice and mineral water and bowed as he gave it to her.

A gown of black velvet moulded Nan's svelte figure in a fashion that left little to the imagination. . . . A deep, curving V extended in front to the middle of her torso, and in back to the very last joint in her vertebrae. . . . She believed in exhibiting the charms that she owned, and what she had was worth displaying!

The gown gave more than a cursory glimpse of the unbrassiered breasts that quivered like jelly when she moved!

The second highball wasn't more than half gone when Jack leaned toward her: "Well?"

Without a word, Nan raised her arms high above her head. . . . In the very deep, flesh-filled hollows just under her shoulders Jack saw red curls clustering in rosettes, the brilliance of their hue outshining the flame of her head!

Jack felt a heat wave chasing along his spine.

"Pardon the remark," he blurted out, "but I didn't think they were in style these days of safety razors and electricity."

Nan laughed. "It's like a moustache! You see, it all depends on *who* tries to cultivate one. . . . Some look terrible, and others are very becoming!"

The heat wave was extending its area.

"Anyway, I like what I've got," Nan added. "And I know several others who do."

Jack nodded. He was afraid he would stutter if he talked!

"We might as well go into the living-room and finish this highball," he managed to say.

On a divan by the fireplace he draped his six feet of bone and muscle. . . . Nan lit a cigarette and walked over to him.

Sinking back among the pillows, she raised her arms above her head again. . . . The perfumed rosettes were now almost touching Jack's wavy brown hair. . . . Turning his face, he kissed them lingeringly. . . . They were as soft as silk down against his lips.

"Oooooooo!" Nan moaned.

Slowly she lowered her arms until they came to rest about his neck. . . . Just as slowly she bent his head backwards. . . . Cupping his face between her hands, her mouth captured his in a kiss of passionate, blinding, twisting fury!

A moment later, Jack began to learn the inter-relation of red hair and crimson soul!

THE IMPROMPTU PARTY at the Burtons' wasn't delayed *too* long!

Marie and Bob had barely time enough to recompose themselves before the first automobile swerved back into the driveway, with Sidney and Letty smilling nonchalantly!

Jack and Nan were more dilatory, but they had a logical excuse. It *did* take them quite a while to find a bag large enough to hold two dozen oranges!

The radio blared forth anew. . . . A fresh batch of cocktails put pep into flagging spirits. . . . There were plenty of oranges, plenty of bottles, and *plenty* of romance!

TELA-PHONY

One evening a young Minneapolis doctor stole a night off and took his young wife to the theatre. They returned about midnight. The doctor shucked off his clothes with despatch and while his wife was removing something or other the telephone rang. She answered.

"Is the doctor there?" asked a voice.

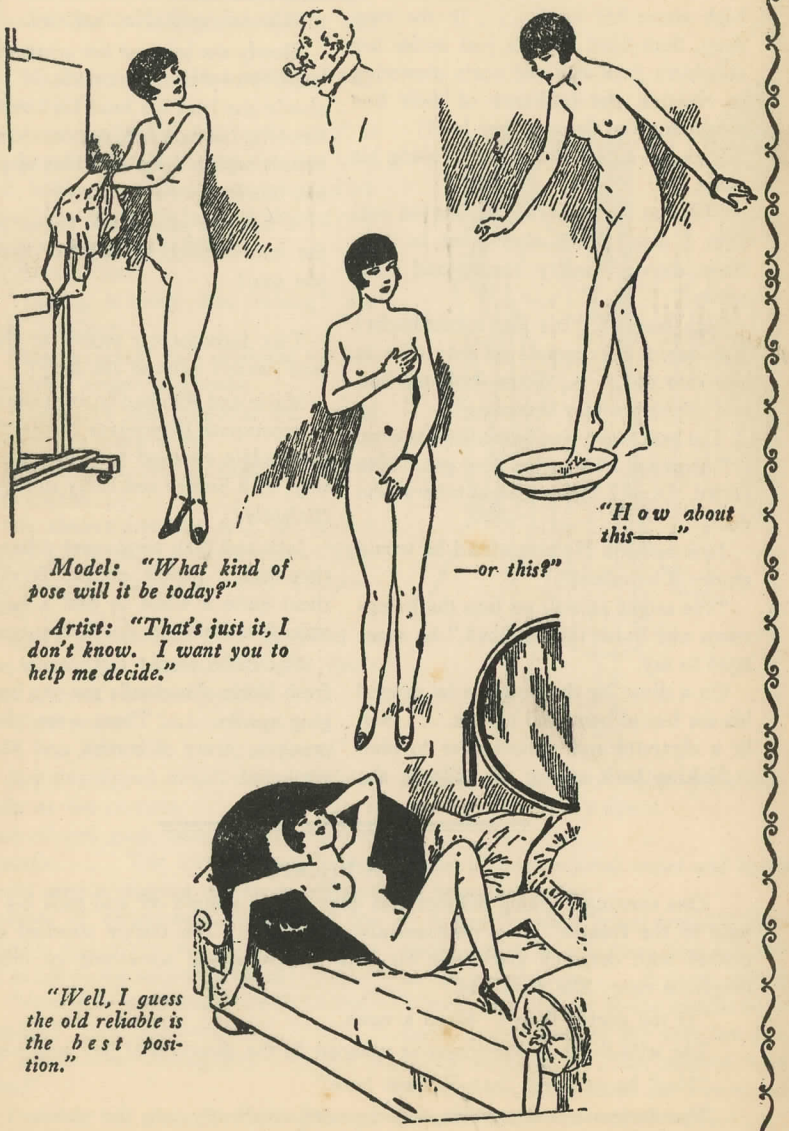
The wife lifted an interrogative eyebrow in the direction of her weary spouse.

"No," he growled, "say I'm not here."

"The doctor isn't here," his wife repeated obediently into the phone.

"Well," snapped the voice, "if the man who is there is a doctor, send him over."

Positions!



Model: "What kind of pose will it be today?"

Artist: "That's just it, I don't know. I want you to help me decide."

"How about this——"

—or this?"

"Well, I guess the old reliable is the best position."